

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.

On VCs

There have been letters written in these columns about the protocol and status of vice chancellors. It is true that VCs used to get a lot more respect in pre-independence days. However, in seeking an enhanced status, consideration must be given to the fact that after 1971, VCs have to compete with a lot more VIPs than was the case before liberation. However, this is not the point I want to make.

We all held the few universities we had before independence with great respect. We took pride in referring to Dhaka University as the Oxford of the East. The universities then were staffed by teachers of high academic credentials and men/women of the highest integrity. Take Dhaka University as an example and let us compare. In the 1960s, the entire arts and social science faculties could boast of no more than a few professors, the highest teaching status among university teachers. Now any department of Dhaka University has a few times more professors than a few faculties taken together before 1971. Had this been due to high academic credentials of the professors, we would have felt proud. But no, the promotions in the universities these days follow bureaucratic principles and teachers are promoted on the basis of number of years served at each level rather than academic excellence alone. This explains the presence of a few dozen professors in the Department of Economics or Political Science in Dhaka University today. The University teachers themselves have downgraded their respect by such actions for which they themselves are to blame.

Then of course while everyone blames the students for indiscipline in the universities, no one speaks of the actions of our teachers in encouraging and sustaining such indiscipline. Dhaka University teachers have been known to indulge in all sorts of activities totally detrimental to an academic environment. I don't want to name such activities but I am sure the readers know what I am referring to. University teachers world-wide have professional CVs that are readily available. We would be interested to see such CVs of, say, the professors of one or two departments of Dhaka University to know where they stand on a comparative scale between now and pre 1971 and in comparison to their counterparts abroad.

The activities of the past two DU VCs should be enough to suggest that the VCs are getting more respect than they deserve. There may be fingers pointed at the political leadership for such people being appointed as VCs in defence of the University teachers. However, that would be unfair because we all know how much DU and other university teachers themselves indulge in politics and keep contact with the politicians. Name one university abroad where teachers do politics as much as the teachers of DU? Does any university abroad have teachers divided into such absurdities as White, Pink or whatever panels as the teachers of Dhaka University? University teachers abroad give up any work that interferes with their academic pursuit. How on earth our teachers find time for such extra-academic work as politics escapes my comprehension.

So in answer to the plea for higher status of VCs by Mr. Haque, my plea to him and his colleague is -- be teachers first and teachers last and then your VCs will be reinstated in the position that they once held and which you seek.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka
Bangladesh Bank

Lest we forget the "Baby"



It was in the early sixties (or was it late fifties?) that those of us living in Dhaka were introduced to the three-wheelers. At that time they were cute little things with working meters. These three-wheelers were given the name "baby taxis" while the genuine taxis (which were mainly Chevrolets) were mostly plying the 'Dacca'-Narayanganj route. We started calling the three-wheelers as "baby" and that became a household name.

Till the introduction of the CNG driven three-wheelers, we knew of only one name and that was the "baby". How ungrateful could we become! No sooner had the CNG driven three-wheelers hit the road, after four decades we abruptly abandoned the name "baby" and started calling them 'CNG's. Little do we realise that CNG cannot be a name. Otherwise, we would have called the old three-wheelers "petrol". CNG driven or not, they are still the sweet old "baby" and all that has changed is their internal supply of a source of power. Why not start calling them again by the name which was a unique one so fondly given by the city dwellers.

Prof. Mamunar Rashid
On e-mail

A cigarette company's defence!

It is exhausting isn't it? Going to work early in the morning, ramming through all this traffic and finally getting to work, and working the whole day. But it still pays when you get a good pay at the month-end. Well, pay is not everything to me. Especially in the place where I work. I love my present company. Working is fun here. There are so many things to do, so many challenges to face. And the sense of honour!

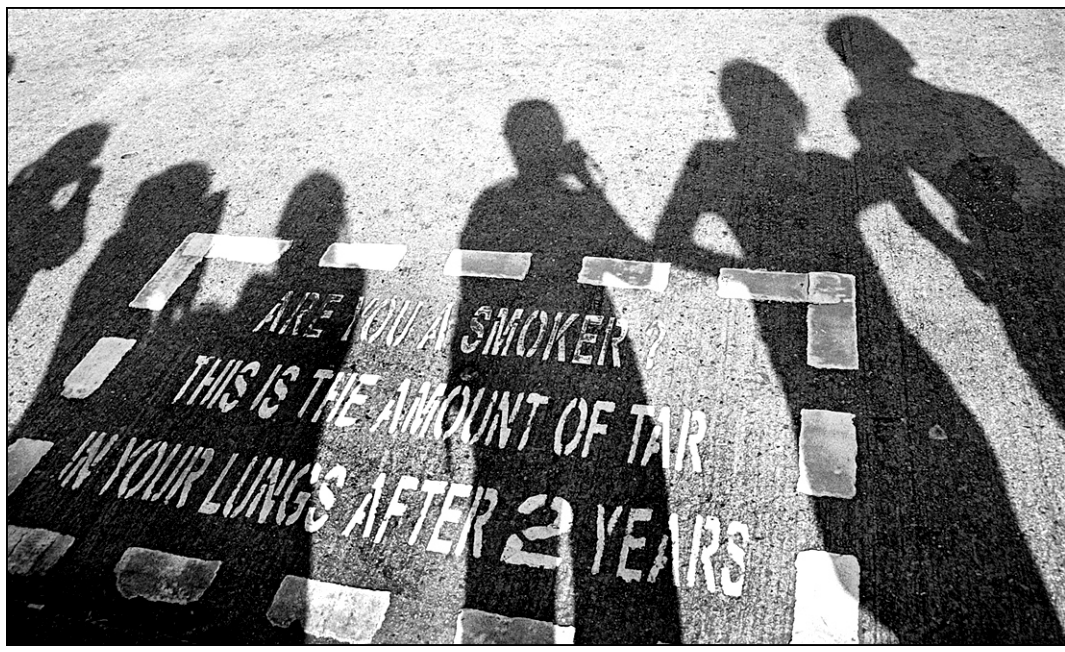
Our company plays a vital role in building the society. We are one of the largest tax payers in this country where no one else pays taxes we pay. We have social awareness programmes on the bad effects of smoking, tree plantation and computer learning centres. We believe that computers have a huge potential in this country. Likewise, we spend millions of foreign currency each year for software maintenance and related items. This country is yet to reach the standard of our requirements. To upgrade the standard we have training programmes for the less capable.

Our employees are very well paid and we do cater for their well being a lot. We are also much aware about their health and provide them free inoculations. We are very careful about the envi-

ronment also. We have great reputation in the country. Still there are people against us.

You cannot do anything good here. This is what makes me sad. There is no use being good. Any way, I am happy and proud about my company. Oh, our business is producing and selling cigarettes. And do not point your fingers at us. We are that much aware to put the message that smoking is injurious to health, and we do not pursue you to smoke. What about all those ads? Oh, those are marketing practices. And what's the difference between injurious and deadly? Who cares you would have smoked our brands any way. We are the best marketing people promoting the best brand, paying the best salary, who can compete with us? Our products roll and that is all that counts. If you are cautious do not look at our ads, by the way we broadcast ads discouraging young people to smoke. Wasn't it a wonderful ad? Any way, the endgame is you all die, may be ten or twenty years earlier if you smoke, whatever brand it may be. That is not much you pay. And our one is best because you're getting the best from the best, and from an IT enabled socially concerned company.

Capt (rtd) Mahrab Anwar
Dhaka



I am writing this letter to appreciate the steps taken by the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to fine 13 branch managers of six private banks for providing more than the declared interest rates to depositors.

I am utterly disappointed at what the managers have done and would like to condemn the act to the fullest. I would like to congratulate the BB for taking such a timely step in this regard. Besides all these positive steps, I must say that the fines imposed on them are very minimal compared to the income of the managers. In fact, a fine of only Tk 2,000 makes a mockery of the whole event. I think the BB should rethink their fining policies so that these unscrupulous managers cannot get away lightly.

Finally, I would urge the BB authorities to look into the matter more deeply as there might be more fish still left in the water. I hope that these recent steps would be a deterrent to all dishonest bankers.

Nadim Naimur Rahman
Dhaka Housing, Shiyamoli, Dhaka

List of godfathers

I was going through a letter focused on the published list of the godfathers of the ruling four-party alliance, prepared by the main opposition, by their own esteemed newspaper on November 3. Such a write up generally doesn't express the views of the editors. In other words, editors are not responsible for such letters, it's absolutely the opinion of the readers. With due respect to

the writer, I would like to make some comments on the write up.

It's noticed that nowadays a few letters are published concerning the present political and social scenario in the country. Most of the letters published in newspapers are encompassing the scarcity of the basic needs or problems of the locality. But seldom we find write-ups in which the government is criticised for its misdeeds or jeered for its indecisive role in ruling the country. Rather, the opposition is bitterly criticised for their role as an opposition in the national politics. I guess both the ruling party and the opposition have equal responsibilities in developing a cordial atmosphere in the political arena, even if it's true that both the ruling and opposition parties give shelter to the miscreants.

In fact some men or political parties patronise the godfathers. But publicly they deny the fact of maintaining relations with these criminals and accuse each other of providing shelter to the criminals. A godfather plays a important role with black money and muscles in the general elections. So if according to the AL there are 101 godfathers in the BNP, similarly BNP can counter it by publishing a list of the godfathers of the past government (AL) rather than escaping the truth by denying the fact and lodging case against them (AL leaders). What they are doing now! By lodging defamation cases against the AL stalwarts, the government is losing the battle because it cannot prove that the AL's statement is false and fabricated. Only they can

harass the AL leaders and indulge in mud-slinging through which they can create a political turmoil. So this is a political game.

But it's painful to see when some of the write-ups covertly or overtly defend the statement made by the leaders of a political party and try to bury the truth. It seems quite unbecoming of a man who is a member of a noble profession. It's a matter of great regret that we find our professional groups divided into different camps. It's expected that a united platform of the professional groups will inject moral courage in the general people to overcome any crisis and fight against any injustice. But alas! Such expectation will remain blues for our countrymen. Some of the intellectuals are blind supporters of a political party.

No matter how grave the situation is such sycophants never enlighten the general people with facts. I think our writing should be impartial and should focus on the national issues, rather than being partisan. So the real situation could be reflected in writings and readers will not be misguided. I hope my letter won't hurt anybody.

Furthermore, I would like to make a fervent request to all valued readers to write something that creates a scope for further analysis. We expect better and constructive criticisms from the writers on different issues that create scope for the readers to think and assess the essence of such writing.

Ayub
Dhanmondi,
Dhaka

Pakshi Bridge

I refer to Mr Marghub Mowla's letter (December 15) on the above subject. I fully agree with the content and call upon the BNP leadership to open a chapter in our politics by being fair and magnanimous.

It will also be a patriotic decision to name the new Pakshi Bridge after Tajuddin Ahmed whose contribution to our liberation struggle was immense.

Sakhawat Hossain
Gulshan, Dhaka

Have patience, politicians

Former premier and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina often calls for movement to oust the present government. The BNP government is an elected one and is supposed to govern the country for five years. If it cannot perform well, it will have little chance to be re-elected. Our people are conscious enough to choose the right leaders, a fact observed during the last three general elections.

Two years have already passed since the BNP came to power. Can't we wait for another three years so that the ruling party can complete the circle? Why the opposition leader has lost her patience and wants to remove the ruling party in an undemocratic way? If the BNP now takes a hard course against the opposition, can it be blamed?

One must give a second thought to the fact that if both the parties are tangled in a fight with each other, the economy would be in a

shambles. Political destabilisation would cause great harm to the economy, which is already carrying a big dent caused by the prevailing political situation. What would happen to trade and industrial people who are playing a vital role in the economy? They operate their businesses/industries taking loan from bank, which they have to return along with interest. If trade and industries are ruined who would pay back the bank loan, the Awami League or the BNP?

People have a lot of expectations from the Awami League, but any undemocratic move to topple the government cannot be appreciated and it is not befitting for the party as well.

It is a fact that the AL was successful in creating countrywide unrest during the previous tenure of the BNP government because of its organising capacity. But this created a bad precedence. The BNP, in turn, tried to create political unrest during the AL rule on the same issue, and if the practice is not shunned this would continue.

The AL might have been encouraged by Georgia's "velvet revolution" or "rose revolution" as it has been termed by political analysts. But one has to learn from the Georgian revolution that a participatory democratic front is needed to remove a ruling government.

Fakhru Alam
Siddeswari, Dhaka

Hasina's remarks

With utter disgust and sheer frustration, I write this letter as I find Sheikh Hasina's call for an international probe employing FBI and CIA into the Kurl arms haul an affront to our national sovereignty. Her remarks, similar to that of other politicians of the country, expose the intellectual poverty of our politicians, and lack a minimal sense of proportion.

What Hasina fails to recognise is that by arguing that FBI and CIA could have unfolded the motive behind the arms haul, she has supported foreign intervention in domestic politics of Bangladesh. As a former prime minister she cannot escape her responsibility in a matter like this.

Given the changing geopolitical scene, perhaps Hasina came to believe that an appealing statement directed towards the sole superpower would make her ascendancy to power a smooth experience, but such calculations are wrong, as the people of Bangladesh will decide whom they will elect as their future prime minister.

Lastly, I suggest that as a leader, Sheikh Hasina rather learn to trust and uphold the dignity of her own people and realise the inherent lesson of the maxim: never dig a hole for your enemy, as one day, you would fall into it as well.

Sartorial freedom

If I am an adult, if I am living in a civilised society, if I am mentally sound, and if I am to attend an invitation to my friend's house, am I myself not enough to select my own dress, shoes, ornaments, or to decide my hair-style? Am I? If I decide to wear shirt-pants or to wear a

Shibly Azad
Columbia University

Ahmadiyya issue

Once again we see the secularists imposing their beliefs on Muslims. Lately, there have been much criticism of the anti-Ahmadiyya activists in the letters column.

Muslims should follow the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions, not the secularists/liberalists who seem to dominate the editorial columns. Abu Bakr (RA) fought against Musailama Al Kazab who had claimed prophethood in the wars of Riddah. So we have to learn from our religious history.

Abu, UK

Football not the answer

writing a rather long letter which had nothing new and it wasn't funny either. It seems that he has misunderstood my letter. I do not at all advocate a football-game politics in Bangladesh. On the contrary, I agree with him that football is not the answer and that is why I prefer to see an end to the football game played with our lives by the two main political parties.

Mr. Ahmed identified the problems-- "we have failed abjectly in the political spheres and in maintaining law and order and arresting corruption." He further suggests "both of them (the top two political leaders) are either directly or indirectly nurturing criminals". But we already know these. He then provides us the solution- "the two ladies with their colleagues must jointly decide to end criminalisation of our politics because our political leaders and

many of us identified ten years ago! No one is disputing the problems we have. No one is disputing the solutions either. What is at dispute is that, how do we go about "implementing" these solutions? If Mr. Ahmed thinks Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia will volunteer to address our problems out of their love for this nation, then he is dead wrong. So the most important question still remains unanswered and, sadly, Mr. Ahmed didn't provide us any answer. I would request him to kindly look at this issue again and suggest how we can force/convince our leaders to do what needs to be done.

In my last letter I didn't ask for the government to be kicked out, as wrongly implied by Mr. Ahmed. I wrote "Let's unite once again and bring about some change". I would also ask him to read some of my previous letters in which I have

A martyr's son speaks



PHOTO: ZAHEDUL I. KHAN

I have read the writing of Asif Munier on the Martyred Intellectuals' Day. We have been working in the Save The Children, however we did not talk about it though we knew that he is the son of the martyred intellectual Munier Chowdhury, one of the great sons of this soil. His killing was a very tragic incident not only for his family but also for the whole nation.

Again, he was very passionate in his writing since he lost his father in his early childhood. However, he sings the song of humanity as he declares that his family doesn't have any hatred for Pakistanis in general. Pakistan has been ruled by the military for most part of its existence and the general voice is seldom heard. However, all those responsible for the killing must be brought to justice.

Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury
Save the Children Sweden-Denmark, Gulshan, Dhaka

Thanks to Shahjahan Ahmed for his reply (13 December) to my letter.

I am happy to know that Mr. Ahmed had a hearty laugh reading my letter, at least my letter was funny! Unfortunately, Mr. Ahmed wasted a good amount of his time

political parties recruit and protect the criminals." I agree with his solution; but isn't that exactly what we have been telling these two ladies all along?

It seems that Mr. Ahmed went to great length in identifying some problems and solutions which

always protested against the idea of kicking out a democratically elected government, whether it is AL, BNP or LGM (Little Green Men!)

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK



(as these countries are known as lands of "freedom" in its blame me or to fine me because I may catch cold or it may cause me fever or cough? I think the answer is "no".

There is no one to force me to change this very personal decision of mine in these countries

I have seen many women in chilly morning or in icy midnight with tiny dresses. Then what is the problem if I decide to have a long coat and pants to cover me properly, and a scarf to cover my head? Or, on top of that, if such a dress is religiously important to me, does it pose any problem to the cohesion of society? If other women have right to uncover most of the parts of their body, why should I be stripped of my right to cover my body properly? Is absolute liberty given in respect of all other dresses (or not wearing dresses) except my dress? Why this discrimination against a dress code that covers our body properly? By choosing such a dress for me, am I causing any harm to others? If not, what is wrong with my selection of dress, which is also mandated by my religion? What about my freedom and liberty? Why should the authority put legal obstacle to deny me enjoying my human rights? Is not such law designed to suppress my conscience that tells me to wear hijab? Is law to protect human rights or to abolish them? Is law to protect freedom of speech and religion or to suppress it? Given that law is for the protection of human rights and freedom, I wish to put a question to human conscience:

I am 27 and have completed my masters degree in two subjects. By profession I am a university teacher; and am living in a western country. Am I not capable enough to choose my own dress? I have taken hijab by choice; nobody has coerced me to take such dress, nor does my family or society have anything to do in this matter. Should anybody force me to take my hijab off?

Kaniz Fatima
UK