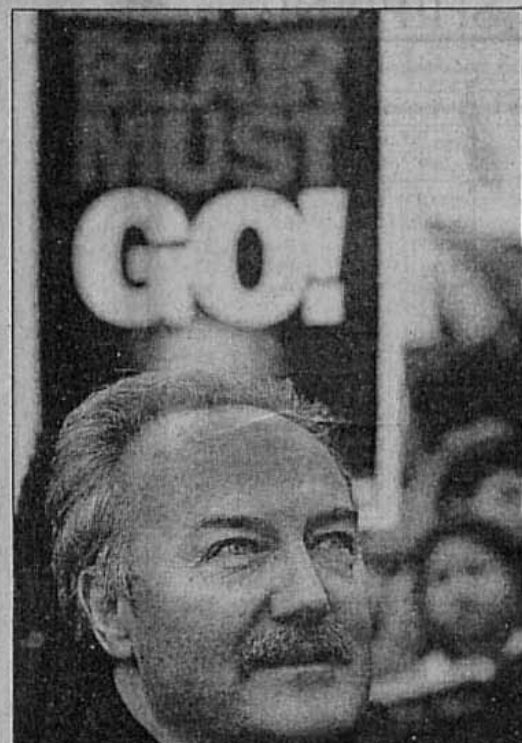


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

The Hutton Report: A lesson for us



I am writing to you after pondering over the present crisis faced by the British government. It was fascinating to see that the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, ordering the inquiry which is now known as the Hutton Report. Mr Blair put himself in a position where, potentially, he could have received much criticism and may have had to resign as a result. This is being followed by the recent announcement of yet another inquiry into the WMD in Iraq and the intelligence reports.

We Bangladeshis in all honesty love to emulate western culture and traditions. It is not clear, however, why we cannot follow the good examples set by the West in matters relating to governance. We have never seen our government inviting trouble for itself in its quest for truth.

Sharif Hussain
Imperial College, London, UK

The festival of sacrifice

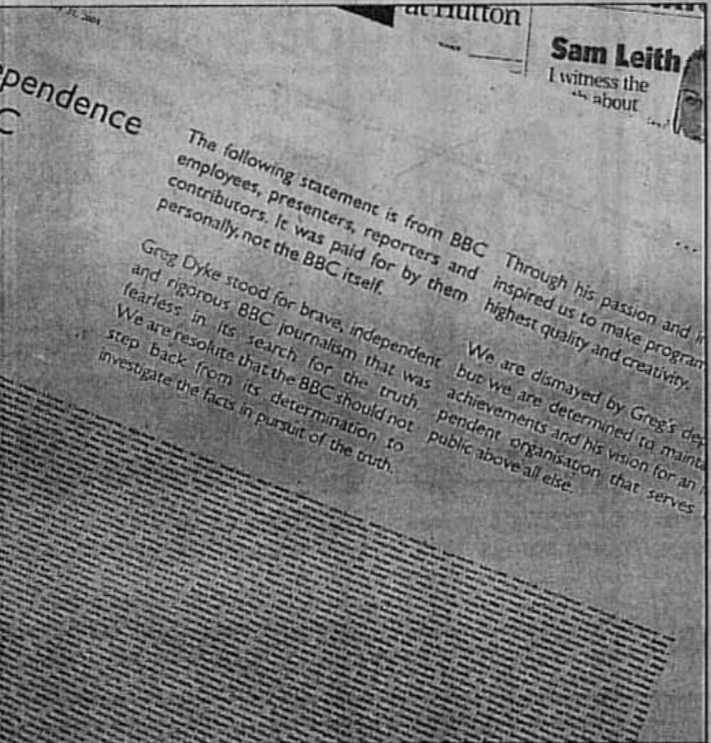
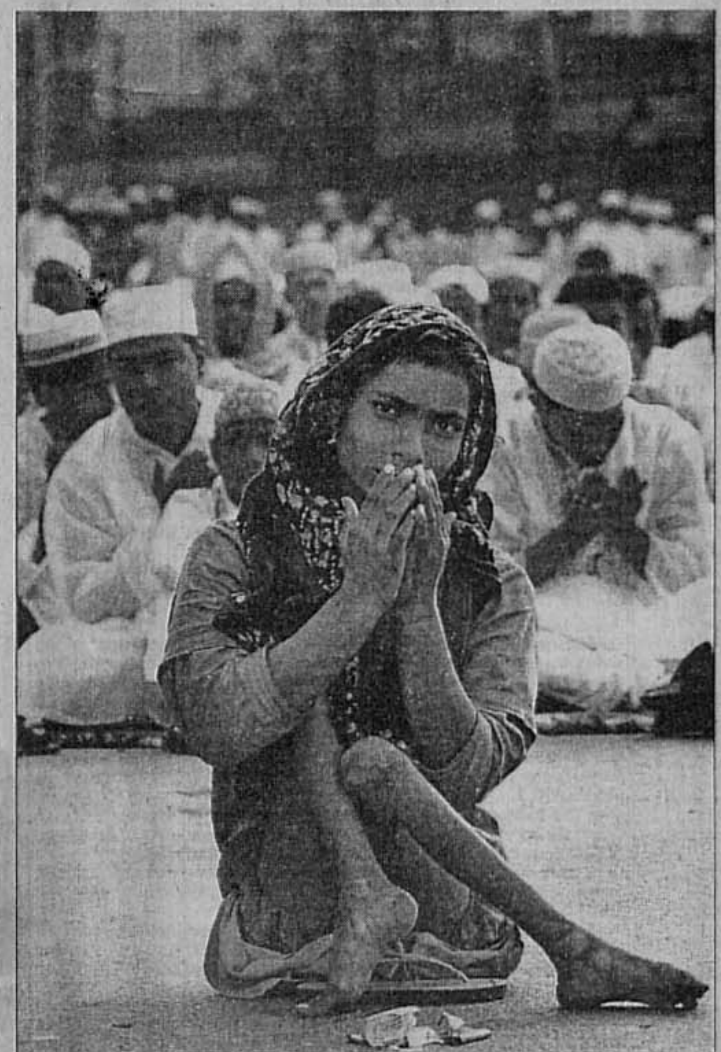
With the Eid-ul-Azha being celebrated only a few days ago, I think it will be appropriate to share the story told by a Business Math Professor at his MBA classroom before the holidays began. It is long but worth a read. I took a rickshaw from Tejgaon Industrial Area to come to the university. Even though I can afford to come in a bus or a car I prefer these three-wheelers because they make me feel free. Since I travel mostly by rickshaw I know what the fares are for a distance like Tejgaon to Mohakhali. So I hop into one rickshaw and the driver asks Tk 12.00 and I say "Well I always pay Tk.10.00 and that is exactly what I am going to pay you." The Rickshaw puller argues about the traffic but frankly it wasn't as bad and I saw no reason to give him any more than Tk. 10. He agreed and off we rode. In about 5/7 minutes we came near the Mohakhali traffic signal and we stopped and waited for the green light. Suddenly, there was this man about 30-35 years old, wearing a worn out, torn-in-several-places shirt and an equally shabby pajama, standing next to the rickshaw and asking for help, saying he hasn't had anything to eat for 2 days and has a very ill mother. Obviously, a typical Dhaka street beggar. For some reason, I have never refused such calls and would always manage to pay whatever little I could. So I looked into my wallet and found a change of Tk 5 and gave that to the man which he took quite gleefully and walked away to the other side of road and then disappeared in the crowd as I rode away. As I reached the university and took out my wallet again, this time to pay the rickshaw fare, the puller said to me, "Sir, if you don't mind, but can I tell you something?" I said "Sure". He said "I understand you are a teacher."

I said "That's correct". He said "That man, the one, who you so kindly gave away Tk. 5.00."

I said, "Yes, what about him?" He said, "Well, do you really think that he was starving for 2 days and his mother was ill? I do not think so, Sir, he could very well be an addict and was simply looking for some money to buy some cheap drug from a nearby vendor. Addicts always do that. You really had no way of knowing the truth, but gave him Tk 5 out of sheer kindness when the same man could earn that money by working anywhere. Yet, here I am using the last drop of my money to pull a rickshaw and trying to make a legitimate living, you refused to pay me an extra Tk 2, just because you never paid so before. For all you know, that could make a difference for me and my family".

As he pulled away with those words, I stood there thinking how things differ from what one assumes and what could be a reality. I did feel good when I gave that change to the man on the street and yet that sacrifice could easily be for all the wrong reasons. Whereas if I had sacrificed that extra Tk 2 for the rickshawwallah, it could make his life better. Maybe not, but he had worked hard to get that chance.

Did people think about this when they sacrificed for Eid? Were they really sacrificing because they wanted to feel good or for the good of the people? Think about the boy or girl who stays at your house to earn a living...who (and probably his entire family) sleeps on the floor on a cold night while you bargain for the strongest looking cattle to slaughter to make your sacrifice. Syed Tariqul Islam, Nayatola, Moghbazar, Dhaka



Public service PR
One cabinet minister is to be congratulated for publicly admitting that government officials were poor in public relations (DS Jan 28). It is an offshoot from the old colonial administration the mentality and the outdated rules. Three basic decisions are required immediately: (1) Speed up the administrative reforms decentralise the civil service (and separate the judiciary); (2) Open a Training Institute for Public Relations in the public sector; and (3) Transfer most SDEs to the private sector (the government doing less and less business to find the time to look after the planning needs of a modern, efficient public service, in this densely populated country of 1,000 persons per sq. km). What is the work load of an official, population-wise? This data has never been released. The various systems losses within the government services are huge, hidden and scattered. A scientific survey is necessary to look at the tip of the iceberg. The basic revolutions need political consensus at the national level; but strangely enough, the parliament is being boycotted by successive oppositions, and the politicians in power are very fond of working more through the back doors than transparently and openly through the front doors. What is the great hurry in pushing through the Modhupur forest recreation project in the name of ecopark, in blind imitation of western concepts? Perhaps it is a business idea of some vested group? The DS of Jan 28 exposed the huge losses in the gas pipeline project to connect over the Jamuna Bridge. The piping of gas in the huge, neglected Northern region is being impeded due to lack of foreign currency, which is again due to the lopsided export and investment policies from time to time. The way the popular cycle-rickshaw issue is being handled at the policy level is rather amateurish. Ad hoc inspirations just do not count! Another point: the jobs and responsibilities of the MPs may be reviewed. An MP is all too powerful autocratically at the local level. Shatter the current negative image of noting system and carrying files in the secretariat, make use of IT, telephone and e-mail to convey decisions and get feedback, not only from the field officials, but also the citizens at the middle and lower levels (the rich and the political workers have enough influence for personal contacts at higher levels). AMawaz Dhaka

Maglev Melodrama: Act II
Magnetic Levitation railway has strongly magnetised the mind of our communications minister and has apparently levitated him to the realms of fantasy. Like the "Charge of the Light Brigade" objection may come from the right of him or left of him or even from his front ranking ministers and lawmakers. He is however firm and true to his commitment. Poor "pro bono publico", theirs is not to question why; theirs is but to do or die. Some will do the "Maglev" magic facade and reap mega dollars, while many will die because of the mountains of money funded into the "Maglev Mammoth" which could have been channelled elsewhere to save many lives of the very

Politics of vendetta
What is going on in the country? The politics parties seem to have gone berserk when it comes to settling scores with each other. It is not clear, as you have mentioned in an editorial, why parties, not individuals, are blamed when something goes wrong. But those who think that they can bludgeon their adversaries into submission are badly mistaken. There is no example in history which supports the theory. And they are still talking about democracy! It is not a realistic proposition in a setting where everything is decided by muscle power. A citizen, Dhaka

Story of 'Borgs'
Many Star Trek fans will be aware of a race called the 'Borg'. Borgs live in a part of the universe far away from the quadrant where Federation, Klingon, Cordassian, Romulan and few other races quarrel together. Borgs are part flesh, part machine and they consider every other race as inefficient and inferior. In the Borg world, there is no "individuality" and no one speaks as "I". Instead, everyone speaks with one voice and they think in a collective mind. If there are ten individuals in a room, we humans will have ten different opinions. But with Borgs, all those ten individuals are considered as ten parts/limbs of one single mind. Whenever Borgs encounter any new species, they don't ask for their opinion or permission before interfering. They just go in with their advance spaceships and assimilate everyone. Borgs assume that since they are superior, by assimilating all other species, they are doing them a favour. Borgs think by joining their collective, all other species will become more useful and efficient. If anyone refuses to give up their culture, their freedom, their beliefs and refuse to be assimilated into the Borg collective, the Borgs tell them, "We are the Borgs. Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated." Star Trek-fevers aside, the closest thing in real life that one can find, is the good old America. Just look at the way America is behaving. It considers everyone as inferior, backward, uncivilised and it doesn't ask for your opinion before interfering in other people's business and "liberating" them with hi-tech missiles! I guess now you want to know how the Borgs are defeated. And yes, there are species that can hit even Borg butts! Azad Miah, Oldham, UK

power of their new found wealth bought them everything BMW, Mercedes, lakeside villa, chairmanship, fellowship, world-tower, rose garden apartment complex, shopping arcade, popular franchise, you name it. Main assets behind their fabulous growth is their capacity to destabilise the order in the society and divide this nation. These are the same people shedding crocodile tears through their own media and mechanisms for every rape, every blood spill, every smoke in such a way that 'all hopes are gone'. Amazingly, in spite of all these factors, all of those economies attracted vast FDI and moved forward. We got to be united to identify them and fight them off effectively to save us and our children. MMHaque Jeddah, KSA

Legacy of guns and goons
Bangladesh remains poor mainly because of its social conflicts. Perhaps it is the only indigenous society in the world. Traditionally, a small population that practices different rhythm in daily chore were woven into the fabrics of the mainstream almost unnoticeably. Here millions fight for a subsistence living, thousands cram into a small polluted filthy neighbourhood. One water tap, one school seat, one medical bed, one blanket in the cold and one unit of cash given as charity is shared by many. A little facility offered by the system is shared by hundreds or by thousands and they have been doing it until recently. A subsistence living did not stir their psychic so much. Traditional values, harmony and consistency did prevail in the society. This was until such a time when a rape or a kill was made a life and death issue for the whole fabric of this impoverished nation. Systematically this nation was made to live divided. Today political divides and social intolerance are haunting the whole nation. Both sides are on full time alert to face each other by any means. Spilling blood is a game for them with hatred and jealousy pampered by their hypocrite leaders. A petty chicken thief (once they did it to make living, to support ailing parents or school going brother and sister), rice smuggler, exam cheat have been promoted to national villain who basically work to increase and enforce the stronghold of the big guys. Dishonest knowledge brokers made themselves social symbols. By doing this all of them moved from subsistence to an unthinkable rich life. The rate

Waiting, hoping....
I have relatives and friends living in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They are of different culture and religion. In a way, I am affiliated not to one country but to the whole of the subcontinent. That is why I feel hurt when there is cross-border violence. To me, it's one of my dear one shooting at the other. Whatever happened I never win. For every explosion that takes place, for every single bullet that penetrates a living body, I feel a distinct pain. This is not just an item in the newspaper for me. Somewhere someone is widowed, someone else is orphaned, a mother feels the pain of loosing a child, another feels the bite of loosing an old age support. In the past, political and military machination has been unjustly used. The victims have learned to hate. Gradually and consequently, the seeds of discontent have been politicised. Hatred is taught, hatred that can only lead to violence, death and destruction, hatred by which others can manipulate us. It has ruined the economy of the subcontinent. Huge amounts have been spent on a never-ending arms race taking away resources from essential sectors. For the sake of every child of the subcontinent this has to stop. We can take lessons from the maturity of the European countries. These countries have fought each other not for decades but for centuries. A single war lasted for more than a hundred years. Imagine the kind of violence and hatred that could have fostered. And imagine the great resolve needed to overcome such tremendous emotions. By regional economic and political institutionalisation, they have managed to neutralise those threats. They still have differences, but these differences are resolved across the table, not by shooting each other. The current peace effort between India and Pakistan is immensely important. Supporting this is not supporting Prime Minister Vajpayee or President Musharraf. As peace, harmony and stability are a must for the economic independence, supporting this effort is supporting the people of the subcontinent. In reality, anybody who does not support any peace effort is an enemy of the subcontinent. If military and political instability continues, the region will become more and more dependent on foreign powers. Without economic independence external forces will control the region. Poverty alleviation will remain an ineffective slogan. There are established forces that benefit from the political, military and religious acrimony of the region. They won't let peace come easily. But there are selfless people who are willing to counter these forces that preach hatred. These selfless people need the support of the public. It is imperative that the general mass becomes actively involved in the peace process. The first and easiest thing they can do is not voting for politicians who are against peace. Unfortunately, the subcontinent has a culture of leader assassination. If the leaders are killed - the whole peace process may fall on its face as the next leader may not be

Developing tourism



As a Travel Agent's widow, there are times when I despair at the failure of this beautiful country to do anything about the opportunity to earn both foreign and local currency, and, of course, appreciation, through tourism. I have recently returned from a short holiday at an excellent guesthouse in Srimongol, but the difficulties of getting there and back were appalling. Even when, by hook and by crook, a train ticket was purchased for the busy day after Eid, it was not possible to travel during the daytime because those trains had been cancelled! Thus I had to travel at night - beautiful Bangladesh being shrouded in darkness - and arrive at 4:00am on a strange railway station. I don't know what I'd have done if a kind friend-of-a-friend had not turned out to meet me. In addition, as it was not possible to buy a return ticket in Dhaka (why, I cannot imagine) we assumed it would be possible to purchase it at Srimongol station. No way! A key employee had gone on holiday, and so the same friend-of-a-friend had to arrange for someone to go all the way to Sylhet to purchase a ticket for the return. I was taken to the waterfall at Madhobkundu. It could be stunning there but someone apparently thought that it did not matter if most of the site had been stripped of its most profitable trees. Filthy litter is everywhere and small salesmen and beggars line every path. Yet, if properly managed (and over-free enterprise curtailed in the interests of ecology, attractiveness and hygiene) it would not only be much more beautiful but could raise money for its own proper care! It was obvious to me that no one actually loved the place and without love, all natural things atrophy..... As one who sings the Bangladesh National Anthem every school day and constantly urge my pupils to find ways of showing their love of their country in the service of it, I feel in need of a few more role-models among the powers-that-be, to show that they, actually, love it too and don't just view every inch and resource in terms of personal profitability. Then there is the tragedy that has befallen those running the lovely Guide Tours Guesthouse at Bandarban that so many of us have enjoyed. It is one of the few organisations that has opened up several parts of this beautiful country so that more of us can actually visit and enjoy it. Frankly, it is easier, for those of us who need to get out of Dhaka for a break, to go to the airport and fly to Nepal or somewhere. But that should not be so! Angela Robinson Principal, The British School in Dhaka

inclined towards peace or may, in fact, be scared of it. Thus the peace process needs institutionalisation. Parliamentary acts, a ministry of peace with substantial power, a subcontinental peace day on the calendar, curriculum in school texts highlighting the importance of peace to the economy of the region - these are only a few of the things that can be done immediately. M. Jamal Haider Macquarie Fields, Sydney

Television programmes
The special Eid programmes presented by the television channels were boring, to say the least. The channels have failed to add anything except in a very few cases. The Eid dramas also followed more or less the same course. Humour was there but there was no trace of wit. Nevertheless, they were better than the routine presentations which fail to impress for many reasons. What I fail to understand is why the producers cannot demonstrate a little more innovative quality. They cannot retain viewers' interest by presenting the same thing over and over again. An unhappy viewer Dhaka

Eid postscript
I don't quite agree with you that the civic services were satisfactory in the city following the sacrifice of a large number of animals on Eid day. The problem is that we have still not identified it as an issue which can cause pollution. Else, it would have received due attention by this time. Yes, we need, as you mentioned, designated places for sacrificing animals as a religious obligation. The DCC should work on the idea with a sense of urgency. A sufferer Dhaka

