

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 Bachelor



A couple of weeks back, I called one of my female students 'heroine of a Bengali movie' quite jokingly. She took it seriously, flared up as if I had heaped on her the worst reproach. She stopped contacting me any further as well. The only cause I perceive is that I have associated her with Bengali movie which has become synonymous to detestation. I don't blame her neither do I blame anyone who avoids Bengali movie as a means of entertainment. It does not mean that people have stopped watching movie. In fact, they watch much more than they did in the past given that the influx of satellite channels has enabled people to have the access to numerous cultures they can stick around for their satisfaction. Regarding Bengali movie, the common people feel a bit disillusioned as it does not represent their values, sense and sentiment. There are two kinds of movies being made in our country. The first stream is 'art film' as they call it which is made for a class of people living in an elevated plane having a sense of introspection and aestheticism. A person with a moderate head and heart is sure to be foxed with it. The second category is cocooned as 'commercial film' made for the people living in the abyss of cultural degeneration. Neither of the categories aims at relating the common people. That's why the prospect and the popularity of Bengali movie is on the decline.

A couple of days back some of my colleagues (everyone is married except me) insisted me to go to the theatre to enjoy 'Bachelor'. Initially I refused to

accompany them though eventually I submitted to their insistence quite reluctantly. My experience has been overwhelming. It does not seem to be a typical Bengali movie ignoring facts and heightening fantasy. At the same time it does not resort to all the traditional elements of a movie such as violence, romance, song, and buffoonery to impress the people by titillating them. It's a different approach and commitment to movie, providing people with entertainment without brushing aside the pinching reality besetting them.

Today's people particularly the young generation seem to have been wallowing in an ocean of crisis springing from a sense of insecurity that has made them restless and callous. They even don't hesitate to experience with their life. To them, nothing is everlasting. Then what is the point of thinking of permanent relationship as it does not practically exist? They relate and isolate and start to explore a new source of relationship. Because of rejecting and being rejected everyone feels that at the end of the day he is lonely, alone and isolated. Relationship devoid of intensity and isolation of individuals is the theme that the whole movie seems to have been revolving around. As a result, it has become the manifestation of today's reality and hence the interest of the people about it. The whole group has accomplished a tremendous work. Congrats, keep it up.

MS Zaman, Lecturer in English, Notre Dame College, Dhaka



Never lose hope

On Women's Day

Let's take oath that If I am a mother then I will give equal rights to my daughter and will never have any bias towards my son, I will always beside my daughter, though others may go against her.

If I am a mother-in-law then I will give my daughter-in-law the same love and rights which I give to my children, I will take proper care of my son's wife, as a true mother does, and will never consider her as an opponent.

If I am a wife then I will never take my husband's mother and sister as my enemies and will consider them as my own mother and sister and never try to isolate my husband from them.

If I am an educated established woman then I will help all the helpless women around me at any cost and show them the right path as a guide.

If I am beautiful attractive woman then I will never try to attract other women's husbands or lovers and if something happens I will give priority to another woman's happiness, not mine.

If I am a simple middle class woman then I will always prepare myself to help my parents financially and emotionally and

will not pressurise them for my fancy wishes.

We are women, we have the power to create love and sympathy and can also destroy peace and happiness.

Naomi, DU, Law Department

The Women's Day has been observed with speeches and rallies. However, everyone seems to be unaware that whatever limited progress has been made towards women's liberation is under siege now.

The rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh and the aggressiveness of the fundamentalists threaten to put the women's movement to the back gear. Women must realise that they are going to be the biggest loser when extremists, using the name and garb of Islam, take away whatever limited freedom they have now.

So it is now up to the women and women's movement leaders to make other women aware of this threat. This awareness must be coupled with financial independence without which they would be powerless. When women rise up the nation will progress.

Raqta, One-mail

Experience with Biman

I'm an English married to a Bangladeshi. On my last trip to Bangladesh I decided to go by Biman and had an awful experience.

The cabin crew are rude and seem to treat the paying passengers as an unwelcome burden. The planes are old, uncomfortable and unreliable, leading to far too many delays.

Sonia Walker
Leicester, UK

Karail fire victims

Mr. Fakhru Alam's letter (DS 10 March) paints a gloomy picture of help rendered to the victims. However, from personal knowledge I know that members of Rotary Club Gulshan along with Rotaract Club of Gulshan, Inner Wheel Club of Gulshan and Gulshan Ladies Community Club have done and are doing whatever little bit they can in cash and kind to help the fire victims.

As an immediate step, Gulshan Rotary Club provided medical assistance to over thirty-five injured and suffering persons on 5th March. They also have some longer term plans for homestead rebuilding, supply of books and other assistance as needed.

SA Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

GM foods

You gave a good coverage (DS, 8 March) to the seminar titled 'GM foods and Consumers Rights' organised by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh. The Minister has very correctly said that any GM food has to be tested before release to the public. However, the keynote paper by Mr. Khalilur Rahman Sajed, which your paper has also quoted extensively, had a lot of one-sided, incomplete and even incorrect information. For example, it was quoted, "hybrid seeds have been driving out local seeds from the market that can cause a disaster in agricultural sector in the long run." I would like to mention here that BRR hybrid *dhan* produced locally has done extremely well in Jessore and farmers are very happy with this seed. Some farmers have also been trained to produce their own hybrid seeds, because hybrid seeds have to be produced from their parents every year and cannot be preserved from the crop.

Another quote, "GM foods should not be used as protein as it can be harmful to human health" is a partially correct statement. Some types of GM food such as BT corn has caused allergies in a few individuals from amongst millions who ate these. I would like to point out here that some individuals are allergic to specific kinds of foods, in this case to the BT protein. BT corn is only a little percentage of the different kinds of GM foods being grown all over the world, including China in a big way. Last year, 170 million acres of agricultural land was used for growing GM food. If it was all bad, why are so many countries adopting this. It is also funny how journalists do not ask the public not to eat egg plants which are sprayed with so much pesticide. We are surely ingesting these toxic substances along with the egg plants. I can assure you that no GM food has been shown to be as toxic as the egg plants we are eating regularly.

Negative propaganda about GM foods by NGOs and some news media has delayed the setting up of the governmental bio-safety committee by four years. If this was operational now, then perhaps we would be sure of the quality of the American cooking oil in the market, instead of making wild guesses about it being GM.

Zeba Iseraj
Dhaka University

Diatribe against NGOs?

Manzoor Ahmed's defence of NGOs (Daily Star, March 8) against the attacks of the finance minister only adds insult to injury where the public is concerned. While the

honourable minister's style of expressing his views against NGOs leaves much to be desired in terms of objectivity, the blanket defence offered by the author is no better. To claim that the business activities of well-established NGOs help to "set ethical and public interest standards in business" leaves one agape. Manzoor Ahmed goes on to explain what "ethical" and "public interest" standards mean. They mean paying sales and other taxes and not dodging laws and rules.

Is he serious? Was it not in the letters-to-the-editor columns of The Daily Star itself that we read that a big NGO was busy filling up lowlands to construct a new campus for a university? and that this was in violation of laws designed to protect us from the horrors of floods?

Sultana Alam
Dhanmondi

Elected despots

Mr. Shahjahan Ahmed in his letter written on your commentary titled "when elected leaders act like despots" is self-contradictory. Initially, he agrees with the editor regarding Sheikh Hasina being prevented from seeing injured Mr.

Azad. But later he justifies the act with the assumption that she might have used her visit for blaming the BNP. He sees only politics in this humanitarian gesture. Moreover, he questions the premise of the editor's conclusion about Khaleda Zia while he draws his own conclusion on pure assumption as above. He wants us to believe that the PM has no responsibility over these despotic acts which her subordinates are responsible for. Surprisingly, Mr. Shahjahan also wants the editor to blame Sheikh Hasina equally, if not more, perhaps just as a balancing act over her some imagined behaviour in the past.

So, this is really all about the blame game that has of late severely afflicted our national politics. Our whole national psyche is now so much blurred with dirty politics, intolerance and meanness that for narrow political gains, investigations into sensational bomb blasts and murder cases make no progress over years. Who is to blame whom for the slide in law and order?

Acitizen
Dhaka

Opposition plan

The leader of the main opposition is asking people of all levels to strengthen the present movement to topple the government. Many other parties are being contacted by the main opposition and their alliance is taking a formidable shape. I have one single question for the main opposition Awami League: Topple the government for whom? For what?

Romeo Ahmed
Central Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Tapping tele-talks

Our national security is always very fragile. It is affected by even a stone thrown by a kid. Let us handle the delicacy of our national security by banning all sorts of communications devices, such as phones (fixed or mobile), faxes, emails and let us also seize all wireless apparatus including radio sets from all people and also ban all technology oriented devices such as photocorders and cameras.

All these may have potential uses that threaten our very fragile and delicate national security. But let us not ban illegal weapons of all sorts, that we see threaten our individual lives, let us give a blind eye to personal security of the

citizens. After all, national interest is much more important than personal interests, including people's lives, rights and wishes.

MA
Dhaka

Law and order

It seems there are numerous organisations to protect the journalists from violence and repression but very few to speak for the ordinary people; people who are not in power, who have no intention of being in power and are not involved in politics. Given the number of violent crimes committed in Bangladesh, which must be one of the highest in the world, relatively few journalists seem to be affected.

People of Bangladesh enjoyed a short lived peaceful atmosphere during the Operation Clean Heart. The operation was abandoned either due to foreign pressure or internal pressure but ordinary people like us would want such an operation back again. It is much better if a few criminals suffer in the process, rather than innocent people in their thousands, including innocent journalists. Foreign Human Rights organisations should concentrate on the situations now prevailing in their own countries.

And when the US State Department talks of human rights, it is just a joke. No one in the right frame of mind can take that seriously.

Zahid S Nizam
One-mail

Computers at ZIA

I have been using computers for over four decades and currently I am associated with one of the IT institutions in Dhaka. I always thought that computers make things simpler and life easier but when I passed through the ZIA immigration counter two days back I found things have become much slower than before probably because of the introduction of the little desk-top machines.

Now I am tempted to believe that if you have a seat at the back of the aircraft you fly slower than the pilot and the Business Class passengers, or at least you reach your destination a tiny fraction of a second later than others.

Fayaz Khan
Joar Sahara, Dhaka Cantt

BTV programmes

BTV broadcasts movies, magazine programmes, talk shows, programmes related to dance and music, religion, etc. But it neglects economic and business related programmes. In BBC, CNN they broadcast business news after every hourly news. In other local satellite channels there are many programmes like this. But BTV -- the only state-run TV channel -- neglects business programmes.

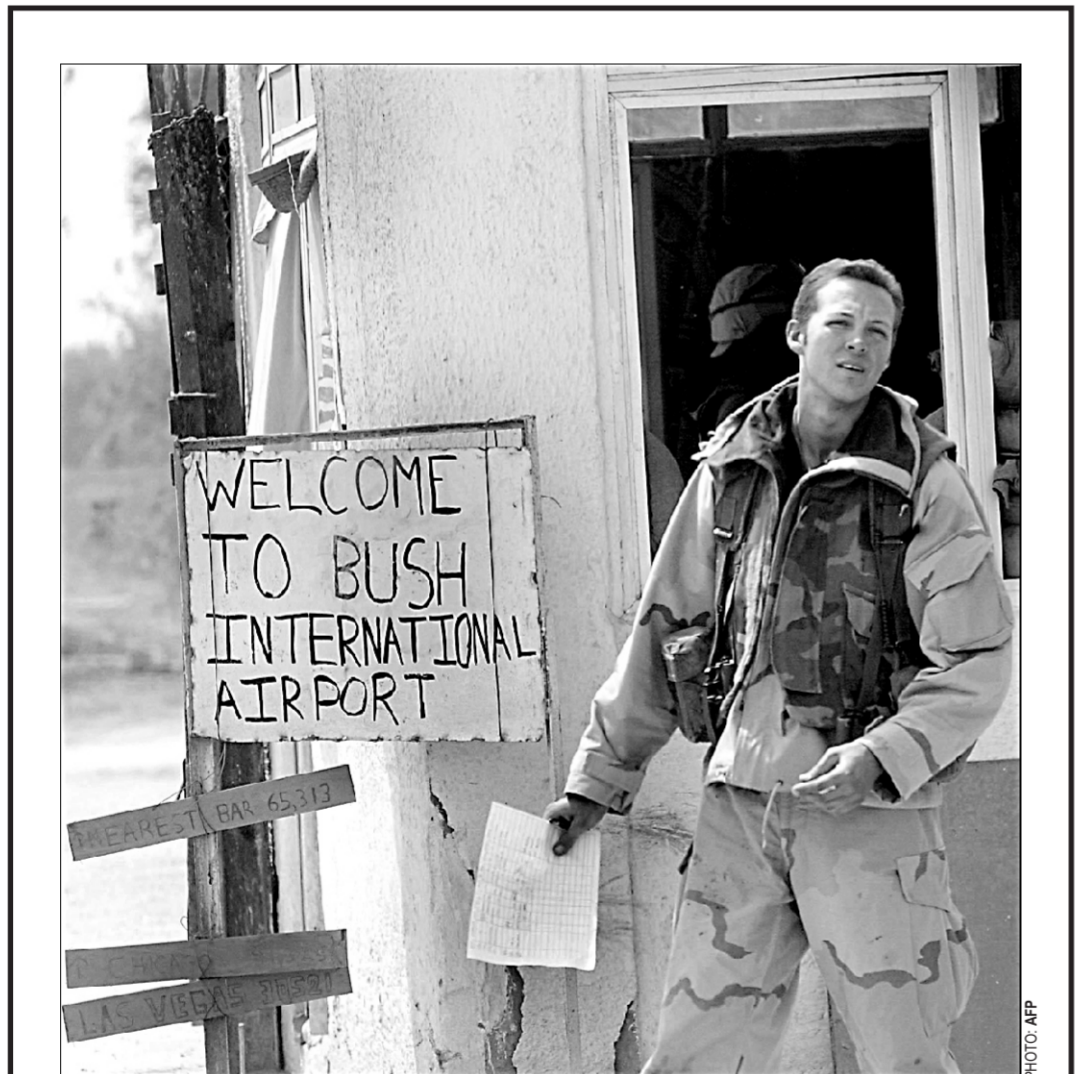
Economy is a major factor for a country. Our daily newspapers publish economic and business news and bring out supplements on important issues. But why should BTV ignore trade and business?

Prasenjit Sarker
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Women members of JS

Recently, the BNP government decided to make certain amendments to the constitution on the strength of its majority in parliament, completely disregarding the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. The capsule of amendments to be swallowed much unwillingly by the nation has a conglomerate of diverse active ingredients shrewdly designed to deflect public attention from real day to day issues. While the prices are rising unabatedly hitting hard the common people, particularly the poorer section, there is no visible action to mitigate those. Both the BNP and the AL eye the seat of power, using the sufferings of the people as a weapon against the other.

March 8, 2004 was the International Women's Day. The BNP led government under the influence of the Jamaat disappointed the



Is it might or right?

US human rights report

There is local proverb, "Chorer Maar Bara Gola", and unfortunately I could not think of a better comment after seeing the usual US Human Rights Report 2003. It has become a fanciful regular event for the United States to publish yearly reports which are mostly regarded as a reprimand to those governments who do not fall in line with the agenda of the United States.

I also do not find much justification in giving too much importance to the report published by a country whose own record of human rights at home and abroad is questionable.

Two questions have been raised in the US. One, the people who voted in majority in favour of Al Gore, saw their rights infringed and two, the higher courts in the

States proved so conservative and inept that they failed in their duty to declare what was just pasting a black chapter on the history of US judiciary. They can perhaps learn from the progressive higher judiciary of the very countries that they criticise.

Globally, the US has blatantly flouted all international conventions and norms whenever it wanted to protect its own interests even if it meant sacrificing its own people (who gives a damn to others?). The invasion of the tiny island country of Granada, hijacking of Noriega -- the very person who they installed in power in Panama, alleged assassination of leaders like Patrick Lumumba, and Salvador Allende, and, above all, illegally confining 600 people (I refuse to use the word

prisoner) in inhuman chains and jackets without trial - are a few examples to study.

What the average American people do not realise is that they are expendable to protect the interest of the big businesses and enterprises. It is after all the "capital" that must be protected at all cost even if it means sacrificing own people in Vietnam, Iraq or any country that needs to be disciplined. Remember the Aesop's fable of the wolf and the lamb? So everything is right if you are the victor, the law of the jungle prevails.

KR Zaman
Allseas Shipping Limited,
Dilkusha Commercial Area,
Dhaka

nation with a constitution amendment proposal providing 45 indirectly chosen women to decorate parliament. This may be categorised as the greatest practical joke (or mockery) for the International Women's Day meted out not only to the women, but to the entire nation, who aspire for democratic values and practices. The BNP proved once again, like their counterpart the AL, that they do not believe in democratic principles and performances. This is how we pay our debts (!) in BNP or AL style. I am equating the AL with the BNP as they also, during their tenure, wanted the same thing, albeit keeping Ershad's original 30 numbers. In fact, BNP's defence and AL's opposition to this amendment only expose their anti-people character.

Acitizen
Dhaka

Of human rights

Your editorial on US State Department's Report on Human Rights in Bangladesh was interesting. It is absolutely true that yours and the other newspapers in Bangladesh have reported over the past year

the same violations that this Report has compiled.

This brings us to a frustrating aspect of our government, not just this one but all governments we have had thus far. The US State Department has been bringing out this Report every year in February for a long time. In case of Bangladesh, there has not been one government that was not criticised for human rights violation in these reports since the report's inception. What is interesting is that the issues for criticism have been the same year-to-year, issues such as custodial deaths, beating of political opposition; arrests without warrant, etc. What is more interesting is that the response of the government in office has never been different either.

Without condoning the government's acts of violation of human rights, it is necessary to take a deeper look into this problem. This is not a BNP specific problem but one that is Bangladesh specific where it is customary for the government to use the police as an instrument of imposing the political will of the party in power over its opponents. Sheikh Mujib did this when he was in power; President

Ziaur Rahman never lagged behind while Ershad gave refining touches to this unsavoury trend. Begum Zia was guilty of carrying on this trend in her first term of power while Sheikh Hasina, no matter how much she laments for "the people" now, was never shy of allowing her police to beat up political opposition. In the bargain, the police on its own used the repressive trend to settle a few scores of their own, thus assisting in the pile up of human rights violations in Bangladesh.

The present government is inept, to say the least. There is consensus on two major points in Bangladesh; one against the hartal and another against the ability of the present home minister to do his job. The PM's continued support for her home minister is no doubt indicative of her current motivation of not doing much for law and order of the country upon which the case for human rights violations rests squarely. Therefore your editorial will fall into deaf ears as many such editorials that were written on this theme before fell on people at the helm.

M Serajul Islam
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

Homosexuality

I refer to a recently published column in your newspaper and the comments made by the author who is a leading educationist, intellectual, columnist, and thinker of our country. As much as I respect the author, my views on his article are diametrically different. He feels that homosexuals should be avoided, nay stopped, like they used to do to lepers and bubonic plague carriers in the middle ages. If we are to ban homosexuality, then logically this ban should also be expanded to cover all the books written by homosexual authors whose contributions to literature and philosophy have been great. Does Peter Tchaikovsky's magnum opus "The Nutcracker Suite" or "Swan Lake" sounds any less melodic because he was a homosexual? I think not. Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon, and is as old as heterosexuality. The author also makes another common mistake that AIDS had its roots in the gay community. This is a fallacy. The medical community generally agrees that AIDS originated amongst the chimpanzees and the

AIDS virus is at some point crossed species from chimpanzees to humans (a process referred to as zoonosis) - probably when humans killed the infected monkeys and/or ate their flesh. In any case, however, it is also true that this dreadful scourge initially spread like wildfire among two distinct groups: gays and drug users. The disease spread in these groups primarily because they were small, marginalized, close-knit communities, not for any other reason(s) par se.

Today, AIDS is on the decline among homosexuals but on the rise among heterosexuals and drug users. Sexual preference, be it homosexual or heterosexual, is one of the least understood, and most complex, of all the mysteries that confounds scientists and sociologists today.

A Farjad Ahmed
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Dhaka

