

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.

Comments on commentary

I fully agree with every point of the commentary "Does the PM really believe in democracy?" written by Mr. Mahfuz Anam on March 15. It's a shame! It's a shame not only for BNP leaders and supporters but also for me because I led JSD in an educational institution for four years. It's a shame for the whole nation because the people of Bangladesh elected them. What BNP did to former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and his supporters was absolute violation of democracy, violation of human rights. It is really true what Mr. Anam mentioned very specifically, "Be with the BNP and its allies and you can get away with every form of abuse of power and enjoy all its consequent 'benefits'. Be against them and all hell will break loose."

Thirty-three years have passed after independence. What have we achieved? All that we have achieved is people are living in our country with daily killing, robbery, forgery, corruption, terrorism, violence, inadequate health care, no social security, inequity and a lot more. Not only before independence but also from the beginning of 1972 to present, our country and its wealth have been owned by some so called corrupted leaders during all governments - from the elected governments to the army-led governments - no one had or has the democratic attitude. We are frustrated. We are desperate to see something new in our beloved motherland. We are bored and scared with family-owned dirty politics. Our country is not a family owned company - we, all people, are the owner of the country and we have appointed BNP for five years to govern the country honestly, not to abuse the power and resources. If the present government continues to stop the voice of this new growing platform, its own future will be destroyed. No dishonest and brutal dictators so far could survive in the history of the world. It's the basic human right of a citizen to criticise the government or opposition. Therefore, I urge to the present BNP

government to concentrate on the development works of our sick and poor country instead of creating violence. If they do better, we, the people of Bangladesh, will obviously recognise their contribution. The ultimate result of stopping one's voice creates unhealthy situation throughout the country and it takes the country backward the development.

Faruk Ahmed

Via e-mail

PM should read the DS commentary

The commentary "Does the PM really believe in democracy" (DS March 15) was very timely and articulated the frustrations of a lot of your readers who feel let down by the Prime Minister. The issues she was to tackle after winning the election like law and order, corruption, etc were difficult ones, no doubt. We never hoped that she miracles would happen and she would turn things around like the way we all wanted.

We are not disappointed by her lack of success on these issues, for we are aware that these are deep rooted and would need support of all parties to resolve. Our disappointment is with the events that have been unleashed upon us in the last few weeks and her reactions. The heinous attack on Dr. Azad was followed by spontaneous protests. It is true that political elements have tried to gain political advantage out of it. In that context, we even thought that some reaction from BNP's youth wing on similar lines to the spontaneous protests. But then a pattern emerged. These BNP youths were no longer looking like enraged young men.

They were looking more like 'Hitler's Brown Shirts', a term that the editorial used and I think rightly so, for they did not stop just in beating people inside the DU campus with police as its ally; they also extended their net and went after B Chowdhury and beat up his supporters in perfect fascist style. If some of us were still willing to support the PM, we couldn't. She

let us down again by allowing her thugs to go after Mr. Mannan and made it clear in no uncertain terms that no one should dare to leave the BNP. If they would be dealt with in the same way as it's been with B Chowdhury and Mr. Mannan. The recent events have made us believe it was decided at highest level of BNP that the best way to deal with defectors was to beat the hell out of them.

The leader who had shown uncompromising potentials for establishing democracy during the movement against Ershad's military dictatorship and articulated the same democratic aspirations while in opposition during AL rule and was equally determined to establish democracy in the initial days of her current stint in power, has suddenly made a u-turn by either siding with the extremists in her party or willingly allowing herself to be run by these elements.

The PM is not only allowing democracy to be a casualty; she is proving what Sheikh Hasina can not, that her government is indeed turning fascist. Time is running out fast for Khaleda Zia and before tackling B Chowdhury or Sheikh Hasina, she needs to tackle her party. She cannot afford to have her political secretary justifying that police was protecting B Chowdhury from public wrath when the public knows that the likes of him turn the thugs he controls on innocent people, people who were just expressing their frustrations against a government that is being run by government with sycophants like him around the PM. The future of the country lies squarely on the PM and her ability to return to democratic norms. We urge the PM to read this editorial seriously for it can save her and the country from destruction.

Rashed Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

Open book exam

The English department of BRAC University is planning to stop the open book system in their semester exams. I know why. In Nilkhet or Aziz Super Market you will see lots

of book shops and if we check, we will find lots of note books of Ramji Lal or S. S. Sen. I am not saying to ban these books or condemning the writers or the book sellers. We cannot condemn Ramji Lal or S. S. Sen for what they write in their notes, because this is their business.

Students can use these books as their reference, but some students don't do this. They use these books in the exams and copy everything.

I concede that some students can understand everything about English very well. For that, they don't need these notes. But what will the students who do lot of hard work for this subject and need the notes do? Open book exam means open text exam, not open notes. For the subject of literature, open book exam is very necessary because it is very difficult for the students to memorize all the quotes.

I request to the Head of the English Department of BRAC University not to stop the open book system in the regular exams and to punish only those students who abuse the system.

Tanmoy Bhattacharjee

English Department, BRAC University

Unprecedented demands

The attack on Dr. Azad was an unprecedented action and of the most serious nature. The fact is that it is a symptom of the deteriorating health of our nation, a very severe one. The teachers have rightly gone on strike but there are people who called for the withdrawal of the strike. Those who called for the withdrawal either do not realise the seriousness of the attack or ignore the fact.

Unprecedented action calls for unprecedented reaction. The teachers need unprecedented reaction to let the masterminds of the attack know that they will not sit still and pretend nothing has happened. Otherwise, attacks on professors might become all too common and easy like so many other evils in the country accepted

The best cricketer in Bangladesh?

A very difficult question and as difficult to answer. But let's take a shot and see where we go: Akram Khan, Athar Ali Khan, Nannu, Shanto, Habibul Bashar? Who is actually the best? The choice is difficult because hardly any of the Bangla-deshi cricketers have performed consistently.

Firstly let's address the question: what do I mean by the "best"? Well, the best cricketer would be the one who gives match winning performances, whose presence should be felt in the team, and team should feel handicapped without him. At the same time, his statistics should speak for themselves.

Bangladesh has won just 4 matches (against Pakistan, Kenya, Scotland and Zimbabwe) and there hasn't been

one player who has provided winning performances in all of them. We can be sure that none of the above performers have been consistent if we have a look at their ODI statistics.

Does this bring us back to square one? Not really, in this letter I want people to think beyond the big names which we hear all the time. I want people to think of a performer who has always been in the Bangladesh team, but never been as popular as he deserves to be.

The unsung hero. He played a vital role in 3 out of 4 victories, vital role in the Multan Test, vital role in all the matches whether Bangladesh has been close to win or lose. One player who comes down to the field with his head high no matter in what situation Bangladesh is.

He is Mohammed Rafique, the highest one day wicket taker and the 2nd highest test wicket taker. Man of the match against Kenya, gives three runs an over on average in most of the games, bowled superbly against Pakistan in '99 and in the latest test series, in Australia and Zimbabwe. One of the most consistent bowler in terms of line, length and accuracy. Though his career has been dogged by controversy, his absence will definitely handicap Bangladesh.

I have been watching and keeping track of Bangladesh cricket for the past 10 years (half of my life). I now live in Canada, but still keep track of my favourite team.

I hope this letter is read by people who are in a position to make a difference. Well not getting too detracted and going back to the main topic: in my opinion, I rate Rafique as the best cricketer ever to be born in Bangladesh.

Shadman, Toronto

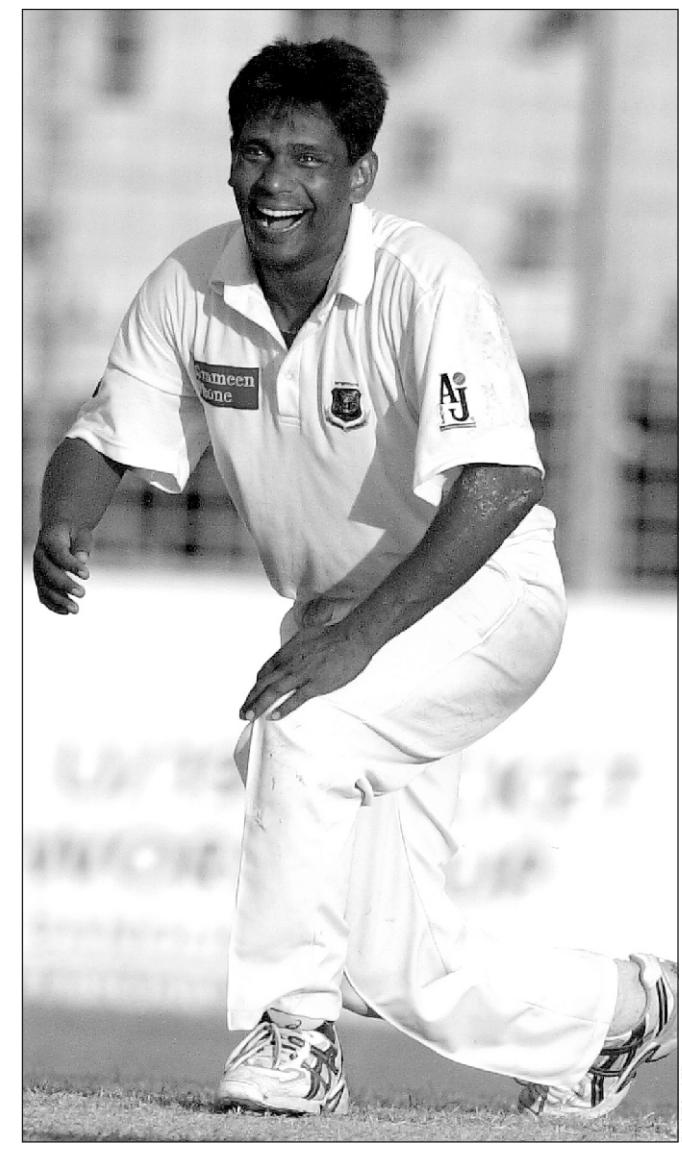


PHOTO: AFP

Madrid bombing, death and politics



"ETA and al-Qaeda away from earth"

Close to 200 innocent lives died and more than 1000 injured. The mind boggling question is -- who was responsible for such inhuman violence and what was gained by such a massacre?

The aftermath of this bloodbath has brought the nation together, the Spaniards and the Basques.

The government of Jose Maria Aznar was quick to blame ETA, the Basque separatist group and he thought that it would serve his party's interest with the general election so near. The British Ambassador in Spain commented that it would be politically damaging for Mr. Aznar to pinpoint al-Qaeda because it meant having exposed Spanish citizen to the wrath of al-Qaeda for supporting the Iraq war.

The British and the Americans of course have their own agenda to blame Al-Qaeda. No senior officials of either al-Qaeda or ETA has claimed responsibility for the mass murder. The tape claiming that responsibility could have been planted because of the dubious nature of its appearance.

Interestingly enough the scale and strength of the bomb attacks could only have been the work of a powerful and a very resourceful group. With the net tightening around terrorist organisations, one is left to wonder about the capabilities of CIA and British Intelligence or is it too far fetched?

Talat
Gulshan, Dhaka

PHOTO: AFP

I think people in other democratic countries including USA, and my beloved country Bangladesh, are very content with the notion that democracy is all about protecting and promoting majority's rights. But I believe that not a single democracy will ever survive in the long-haul without advice and consent of minority (political party like Mr. Chowdhury's one). The BNP should do some soul-searching. People should be ruled by the law of the land not by the will of other ignorant men. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the same fate as Mr. Mannan if they keep their mind.

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In this connection I would like to share an incident that I have heard from my younger sister. Last week some of her friends went to a shop to buy some dry foods. At that moment, a boy entered the shop and asking for a 'Hunter', which the manufacturing company is calling 'malt beverage'. The shopkeeper informed the unavailability of the drink and the boy went out but came back within a few minutes and offered hundred Taka for a can. The shopkeeper then agreed with the boy's offer and brought out a can from a small room of the shop. So, we see how this kind of malt beverages are destroying our future generation and how the unscrupulous businessmen are making money in such a filthy way.

However, it is a good sign that the government has already banned the product and taking action against the guilty shopkeepers. We, the young generation must

be united to say 'no' to this kind of malt beverages as well as other alcoholic products for the betterment of our country.

Md. Ehtashamul Karim Anu

West Shubidbazar, Sylhet

Holiday shifted!

If I understood it correctly, the government has declared a public holiday on March 27. Because Independence Day (March 26) this year falls on a Friday (weekly holiday). Now, what was the compulsion in doing so? Does it mean that, henceforth all holidays falling on the weekly holiday will automatically be shifted to the next working day? If so, why such a decision after all these years -- and, as if this



What's going on?

These days, a favourite topic for starting a conversation with the friend or with someone your colleague is "What is going on in this country?" Immediately, the question gets both parties engaged in an animated exchange of opinions, gossip they have heard, and even personal plans if this or that should have done. Dr. Chowdhury's challenge to the BNP leadership, defection of two seating BNP MPs and joining hands to Dr. Chowdhury's third or alternative force and subsequent repressive measures taken by the government on them, especially on Major Mannan of course, always gets special treatment in these conversations. Everyone connects with the issue right away. It is interesting how strong and diverse does the BNP renegades generate the emotions. One wonders whether this reaction is a sign that people actually believe that their lives would change for the better or for the worse if they win in the political fray. Somehow it puzzles me that people can get very agitated when discussing the defects and virtues of the various 'dignitaries' while declaring in the same conversation their cynicism about their lives being improved by the outcome of the situation.

While the recent political stories, i.e., AL's die-hard movement, emergence of Dr. Kamal Hossain led national platform for unity, Dr. B Chowdhury's frantic effort to offer people an alternative, and finally, worry over political situation in Bangladesh by the international community can definitely compete with cricket, it is a pity that our interest in governance or politics extends little beyond the high ups and the

national positions. National issues evoke as much passion especially among residents of the capital city but what about the rural people? It is certainly extremism to attack a renegade MP personally and destroying his businesses but there are hundreds of such stories in our districts and villages that are subjected to organized hooliganism and violence. The minor attention given to people's miseries and hardship together with the governance situation is regrettable given that the choice of local people could actually matter more than national politics. Two of our renowned editors of the English dailies that I did read ran tougher commentaries apart from writing tough editorials regarding the recent vandalism. Its praiseworthy, but how to protect the educated urban limited income class together with the literate or illiterate rural poor?

Competent and development-oriented leaders can make a difference in delivering better, cost-efficient services, it is true. We know such good leaders do exist, but the challenge is to get people to know them. Here, I use people to mean the majority voters of our land, who, most of the time, need manoeuvring. And here it should be the job of all concerned to promote them, if we really think that the conventional parties should be abandoned. So, perhaps, we could open our conversations with, "something positive is going on in our country, isn't it?"

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