

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.



Advancing Biotechnology

We would like to begin by commending Prof. Ahmad Islam for his very timely articles about advancing the future of Biotechnology in Bangladesh. For us, Biotechnology is not a just a "nice to have" expertise; rather, given our enormous dependence on agriculture, Biotechnology holds the key to multiplying our agricultural output many-fold as we move from subsistence agriculture to high value agriculture. If we look at Japan, the noticeable similarities are that she has a similar land area and similar population size. However, her agriculture output is scores of times higher than ours because of a very efficient utilisation of land resources in high value crops.

We urge our authorities to take note of the recommendations of Prof. Islam and act upon them, especially in the following areas:

1. Activating the NIB into a dynamic research engine with partnerships with NGOs so that high salaries may be given to foreign-trained Bangladeshis for developing commercial applications of Biotechnology that can be utilised by the NGOs and the farmers. One commercial application that is sorely needed is garbage processing to generate methane gas that can then be used to generate electricity.
2. Adopting bio safety rules through the parliament.
3. Turning the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences into an active advisory body of the government to present ideas for the development of the nation from both local and foreign-based Bangladeshi scientists.

Khalid, On e-mail

CTG Port -- security aspects

Like millions of other citizens I feel concerned about the international arms smuggling syndicates and the absence of one-umbrella security coverage of Chittagong and other sea, river and land ports.

It is reported (DS April 7) that the jetty of the urea fertiliser factory is outside the surveillance of the CPA. This is faulty planning of over-all security monitoring. The implications of the monitoring of ALL movements in the Outer Anchorage and near port zones need strict review and recasting.

The approach is simple: plan for the worst situations. That ensures mental and physical preparedness; and the existing security system can spring into operational alertness within seconds. Rehearsals have to be on regular basis with sudden dummy exercises. No activity induces lethargy and complacency, and the teams on shift duty are caught off guard.

In these days of global terrorist activities, security in any country has to be up to date. But even the 9/11 aerial bombing of NY caught the superpower off guard.

Looking back at the local scenes, no boat or vessel may be allowed to come alongside any visiting ship on any side except through the authorised jetty. Loudhailers may warn of shooting and capturing such boats if the rules are violated.

The point is that when politics is

corroded, the entire system is corrupted. Rely on whom? Not on human beings, but on equipment and systems where human islands and pockets are minimum. It is expensive but electronics has advanced spying system.

One point comes to mind: the visiting dignitaries (local and foreign) should not be received with bunch of flowers or any physical object (too much risk involved in physical transfer or handing over). There are other aspects of detailed planning with which the experts are familiar.

Md. Abad, Dhaka

Poor BTV quality control

At home, as a viewer of BTV programmes (since the 1960s), I have to convert my drawing room into a supplementary BTV Control Room to fiddle throughout the hours with the controls of the TV receiver set to get the image right (brightness, contrast, colour, audio, and sometimes tuning). This is the responsibility of the C/R at the BTV station (Dhaka). Which viewer likes this sort of voluntary service?

It appears that technical monitoring at different engineering levels is slack, and the seniors do not bother to pull up the shift-in-charge.

The professional pride appears to be missing with this type of slack quality control (the engineering officials are trained and experienced!). The problem is aggravated

with outdoor shootings, perhaps due to use of non-professional camera and other equipment.

What is happening to our country?
Alifzulfi, Dhaka

Policing the civilization

The US leaders have taken upon themselves the seminal (not dirty) job of Americanising the religions, philosophies, cultures, traditions of the rest of the world after September 11.

Two basic points stick out: they are not qualified to do so; and they invited the catastrophe upon themselves through their myopic view of the other worlds. One of which is called the third world. The fourth dimension is mission.

Too much prosperity within two centuries. This peaked superiority cannot last. While the continuity of religion(s) is steady, flashy materialism has its ups and downs. This phenomenon the world is witnessing today. This acceleration of bitterness (in chasing historical processes) came through accumulation of hatred and grievances through the generations. Lows and depressions lead to cyclones and hurricanes; and in this made-made world, politics and economics combined to create the demonstration on the WTC Towers in New York. It was timed internally in the system through automatic feedback build-ups. The bombing of Pentagon is simply unbelievable fact is more incredulous than fiction.

Prof. Stiplitz, the Nobel laureate

on Economics (for his thought-provoking dissertation on "asymmetric information"), and former chief at the World Bank has confirmed his doubt on the way the WTO guidelines are being enforced on the poorer countries (his recent visit to Dhaka).

The laws of physics and mathematics last longer as confirmation is available in the behaviour in Nature's complex system. But in the fields of economics and politics, the hypotheses hardly mature into theories before creating problems in different worlds. Something is wrong in the approach. Before getting lost in the luxury of the details inside these dense forests, the developed countries also have their Sunderban (the beautiful forest). Ours is polluted and we are not allowed to cut our forests as the Europeans did for industrialisation.

Back to the marines, the missiles and satellite spies. The field blitz operations cannot be matched by the technologically weak defending countries (Afghanistan and Iraq). Now the Yankee religious think tanks are bogged down studying Islamic *fatwas* and views on jihad and other religious beliefs based on the origin of Ladenism (it time to coin this expression). The communists are also under the lens in far-way N Korea.

It is the Brownian movement of politics on which the experts and analysts do not devote much time. This is a sideline, away from headline politics. After the World War-II

(1939-45), it has taken four or more generations and half a century for the Western itch to return. Nature has also pitched in with quakes, droughts, floods, forest fires and freak weather.

The new Quakers are coming: Bangladesh is included in the movement, like it or not.
AZ, On mail

When will it stop?

As a regular reader of the DS, I often find articles describing the tension and violence gripping the country. The recent arms haul in the port city has given rise to many questions. Rather than investigating the incidents, the government is finding ways to put the blame on the opposition.

I see no light at the end of the tunnel.
SK, On e-mail

Beautiful Dhaka!

The beautification of DU campus zone as conceived by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is their latest publicity stunt to divert public attention from the mismanagement and mess that they have created in the city. The letter of M. Mawaz in the DS (07 April) rightly points out to the DCC's misplaced and questionable priorities. Whereas the DCC's main thrust should be on operation and maintenance of the city amenities and infrastructures (conservancy, water supply and sewerage, roads and walkways etc), it is observed that they are engaged in non-productive new projects that probably improves the health of their pockets and not the city dwellers. Professional architects or urban development experts will never go for such type of cosmetic work. Well thought-out development work, smooth operation and proper maintenance of the city amenities and infrastructure will automatically result in a beautiful city.

Superficial decors, unplanned signs and symbols etc. only add to the blight of the city. Cosmetic hodgepodge -- as seen along the airport road in the 80's (arched screens, walls, festoons etc) or as conceived recently by the DCC for DU campus zone -- is never sustainable.

Z. Islam

Monipuripara, Dhaka

What a sacrifice!

People of the middle and lower middle class are born with a lot of responsibility on their shoulders. They have to pass most part of their lives struggling for earning two square meals a day. From the very beginning of their childhood they have to engage themselves in working with their parents in all household affairs. For doing the tasks imposed upon them by their parents, they cannot enjoy games and sports along with their classmates or peers. At the same time, they are also deprived of all recreational and entertainment facilities like watching TV, listening radio, handling computer, sending e-mail etc., on account of the insolvency of their parents. Thus the childhood of the middle class children become uninteresting and detrimental to their mental growth. Besides, they have to carry out their studies through so many thick and thins. Most of the middle class parents defray their children's educational expenses through various difficult means.

Despite being poor, some of the parents are seen trying heart and soul to educate their kids by keeping themselves half-fed or un-fed. They supply good foods and new clothes to their school, college or university going children. What a sacrifice it is for their children!

Babor A. Mir
Assistant Commissioner,
Meherpur Collectorate

BTV and cricket

Since there are so many cricket fans in Bangladesh, BTV is telecasting important ODI cricket matches. It is a matter of joy for those who have no satellite connection with their television sets. This type of spectators are watching cricket matches, thanks to the BTV.

But the fun of watching cricket is often spoiled by telecasting of news and all such important things.

I would request the BTV authorities not to deprive us of the best moments in a game.
Muraduzzaman
Tejgaon, Dhaka

DU canteens

Last Tuesday (6-4-2004) I along with my two friends were walking on the Dhaka University campus. In fact, we were loitering around the science faculty's annex building. At that time we saw a very nice, new Nescafe canteen just opposite the university gymnasium. Its environment and accommodation is quite remarkable. I haven't seen such a beautiful canteen on the campus in four years and a half of my university life.

I've just completed (results yet to be published) my BBA from the Business Faculty. So, nowadays I seldom go to the university. It was really an astonishing sight for me.

At that moment, I felt very sorry for the Business Faculty students. Of course, for those who are living in their homes. Because the students who live in halls, during the university life, gather a totally different type of experience. As students of



The AL deadline

Over the last few months, the main opposition Awami League and the BNP-led alliance government have been locked in blistering accusations and counter accusations and blitzkriegs on each other for their own political ends at the cost of millions of people.

The Awami League threatened and vowed that it would oust the BNP alliance government from power by 30th April, 2004, though the party has now climbed down a bit from its position.

Some political VIPs like Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury, Dr. Kamal Hossain and others also asked the prime minister to step down for various reasons.

But the BNP says that the people have given mandate to the alliance government to run the country for five years and as such the question of quitting power by them does not arise at all before the expiry of their term.

The question is, even if the prime minister decided to quit, who would have succeeded her? Sheikh Hasina, Dr. B Chowdhury, Dr. Kamal Hossain, Hussain Mohammad Ershad or any other person? What would have been the basis of her/his authority?

Nobody says that she/he wants to become the next prime minister. But as a matter of fact everybody wants to capture the peacock throne of Bangladesh. But as soon as one sits on the throne, others

start opposing the prime minister. This is the common political phenomenon in our country.

The Awami League had been insisting that it would remove Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia from power by hook or by crook on or before 30th April. But it never spelled out how it would oust the government from power? What would be its *modus operandi* for toppling the government?

Only recently the Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil said that the Awami League would oust Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia from power through constitutional means.

Awami League MPs do not attend parliament. They do not possess sufficient votes to pass a no-confidence move against Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP-led alliance government which enjoys two thirds majority in the Jatiya Sangsad.

So what would the Awami League do?

It is reported that the Awami League MPs in the Jatiya Sangsad would resign en masse and demand mid-term general elections in the country. Would that be enough to force the government out?

Assuming that something like en masse resignation will take place, we can foresee what will happen. The Election Commission would hold bye-elections to all vacant seats of the Awami League MPs within 90 days. So there

is a prescribed method of facing the situation; so we cannot understand how the AL is planning to oust the government.

If there is political chaos and confusion, and a mid term election is held, what would be the ultimate output and result of tenth mid-term election? Would not the party or parties, which would lose in the election, blame the caretaker government?

It is suggested that our political leaders Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina, B Chowdhury, Dr Kamal Hossain, Hussain Mohammad Ershad, Rashed Khan Menon and all others concerned may kindly think about the pros and cons of the political situation prevailing in the country, and arrive at a consensus of opinion on the following/points and then take any action they might deem necessary in the greater interest of the country.

1. Powers and functions of the caretaker government.
2. Independence of Election Commission.
3. Acceptance of the results of the general elections.
4. Maintenance of law and order.
5. Attendance of Jatiya Sangsad by MPs.
6. Eradication of illegal toll collection, bribe and smuggling.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

America's role

We are outraged over the situation in Iraq, which has arisen due to the activities of the so-called liberators of Iraqis. America and Britain attacked Iraq unjustly and formed a coalition force to shred the country to pieces, the historic land has turned into ruins; it is flooded with blood. It seems that the liberators have come to liberate the souls of the Iraqis from their bodies. What right have they got to invade a sovereign country, kill its people and make their lives miserable? America has made a mess in Iraq and people all over the world are seething with anger for its inhuman and loathsome actions.

Why isn't the coalition force leaving the Iraqis alone? It would be a blessing for the Iraqis, they were much better placed under Saddam's regime. They must be realising it now.

The people of America, Britain, Spain, Japan, Italy and other countries which have sent soldiers, must force their governments to bring them back. The soldiers had no reason to be there and are unnecessarily losing their lives. We are feel sorry for those families from which fathers, brothers and sons have been sent to fight an unjust and immoral war. May the Almighty Allah save the people of Iraq from this ordeal and instil a bit of humanity in the mind of G.W Bush, the president of the United States.

Nurjahan, Chittagong

Iraq bleeds

I think Mr. Bush should get out of his oath and thus allow thousands of people of Iraq as well as the US live in

peace with their families and carry out normal activities. Mr. Bush is a war-monger whose brutality can overwrite the deeds of Adolph Hitler. Hitler would have been ashamed of seeing the so-called war led by Mr. Bush had he been alive.

I still can't figure out how the whole world silently watches his insanity for such a long time. I still remember a quotation of one of my students where he wrote about the war on Iraq, "If your house is besieged by robbers, no way you can call it war."

Can you call this war?

Badal Hasib
Asad Avenue,
Mohammadpur

