

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.

Are you living with smokers?



Though not officially reported, we guess that every family has smokers in Bangladesh. Smoking is very bad for health for all ages. Recently, researchers published results from two population cohorts of adults who had never smoked. Among adults who had never smoked researchers found a modest but consistent association between exposure to second hand smoke at home and mortality. This association persisted after adjustment for age, ethnicity, marital status, and socio-economic position. Adults who had never smoked and who lived with smokers had about 15 per cent higher mortality than never-smokers living in a smoke-free household. Mortality among never-smokers was greater in those living in households with a current smoker. They considered exposure to second hand smoke at home only. The finding of about 15 per cent excess mortality in never-smokers exposed to second hand smoke at home is consistent with the previous largest study in the same area. The results from this study add to the weight of evidence of harm caused by passive smoking and support steps to reduce exposure to other people's smoke at home and in other settings. Let's STOP smoking from now!

M Jahangir Alam
Kansas State University, USA

education to students. Do they feel it is OK for them to collect their salaries and enjoy other perks by working half the time or even less?

The BNP today is an institution of failures. But let us not forget that you too have failed us badly.

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

Where is the martyr of 1757?

I support fully the letter of Mr. Mehabub published on April 23. I was also amazed when I didn't see any name of the martyrs of the Battle of Palasy like Sirajuddowla, Mir Madan, Mohon Lal etc.

Among them was the name of Sirajuddowla should have been among the names of 20 greatest Bengalees of all time. This was an unacceptable omission on the part of the BBC.

Jishan
Department of History,
Dhaka University

Thai Muslims in trouble

The Buddhist majority of Thailand is well known for hospitality and tolerance. Thailand has been a bright example of harmony and peace among different communities. Unfortunately, things are not the same now. The heavy-handed police action is giving rise to state-sponsored terrorism against the minority Muslim community.

Now the spate of abduction of Muslims is traumatising the Muslim community. It is alleged that common people are being abducted and killed by the police.

Muslims are struggling to put on a smiling face in 'the land of smile'. The Thai government should take measures to address the problem which must have been greatly aggravated by the bloody incident last Wednesday.

Sumon, Dhaka

AL plan

Awami League (AL) is desperately trying to return to power. It had promised to overthrow the elected government by 30th April, 2004. And we knew what we would have to face—absolute anarchy.

The prevailing situation in the country is very bad. It is getting worse day by day. But that does not mean that the government must step down. The people of this country have democratically elected the present government and an elected government must be allowed to complete its tenure. No party has the right to oust a government. Only the people have that right and the AL must wait till the next general elections, scheduled to be held in 2006.

But what happens next? Another party will take office and the opposition will begin their programmes of hartals, anarchy and vandalism to unseat the elected government.

Is it the fate of Bangladesh?
Naureen Rahnuma
Borhanbagh R/A, Sylhet

ICDDR, B service

This is an international organisation with high standards and it has extended commendable service to eradication of cholera from Bangladesh.

All is fine, but the proverb goes there is always a cloud under the sun and I experienced this 'cloud' hanging over ICDDR,B's sky on 20/4/04, when I went there for some medical tests prescribed by my doctor. The first thing that stuck me is the ignorance of the Men at the Reception Centre, who firstly misquoted my name, secondly, the Doctor gave me 5 tests, but, the man at the counter was continuously harping on my sugar test, leaving aside the cholesterol, HDC & LDC test. When I asked him to go through the 'prescription' minutely, he realised the mistake that he had made and corrected his shortcomings.

The 'lady' who was taking the blood was equally shabby, and always held her saree with her left hand, and was doing her job with the other hand. This disgusted me, and, I wanted to meet the CEO, and, apprise him/her of the shortcomings, which were least expected from an organisation of such international repute. However, unlike the Bangladesh high-ups who insist on your bio-data, or, your ancestral history to give an 'appointment', the ICDDR office immediately took me to the Director, Human Resources. She was very kind and immediately noted down my suggestion to place an M.B.B.S at the reception, so that the visitors are assured of the right tests according to the prescription.

Tayab-ul-Huq, Uttara, Dhaka

Irregular and redundant appointments

Against the approved posts of 24, Class III-6 and Class IV-18, there are more than 124 Class III and Class IV employees on the staff-roll of Tejoan College. Each employee of this category draws on an average a monthly salary of Tk 4,000. It means the college bears from its own fund taka four lakh per month on the head of 'salaries to non-teaching staff', in excess of actual needs as per the staffing pattern of the government. The principals concerned, whenever in position, under pressure of circumstances or having the opportunity of using their discretionary powers made these appointments. These extra employ-

ees enjoy all facilities of the regular staff. Considering the crisis of employment in the job market, such apparent irregular recruitment may be viewed leniently if at least they are appointed on daily basis or ad hoc basis as is done in the public universities like Dhaka, Rajshahi and National University. The college that needs at least 200 (two hundred) regular teachers for 27 departments, of which 23 departments offer Honours and Masters courses, has only 126 regular teachers, far below the requisite number. If the appointment of 125 non-teaching employees as against 24 approved posts can be approved by the college authorities, there can be no reason why it should be difficult for

survey. Siemens of Germany and Huawei of China will jointly roll out the nation-wide mobile network to initially serve 250,000 users. The service is targeted to be launched by this year-end.

BTTB took 20 months to finalise these two vendors selection for supplying the infrastructure of public sector mobile service. Besides widespread media criticism, the ruling party cabinet members had also officially objected to BTTB's vendor selection procedure. BTTB's own board members had also officially opposed this procurement plan. But it was still okayed!

Abu Saeed Khan
On e-mail

of most corrupt countries in the world for four successive years. Education is a part of this system, in which the public, private and private voluntary sectors play an equally unaccountable and non-transparent role based on unholy partnerships with each other. There are exceptions; but generally speaking, it is the poor end-users who pay the price. Inefficiency, including corruption and low quality education in the public sector is no more a secret. The privileged parents increasingly send their children to private schools. Some of these schools are acceptable, but they often indirectly coerce the parents to make donations toward expansion of the schools. This could be a good

4. Establish an indicative planning framework, clearly defining the objective(s) of basic education; standards, with parameters and monitoring and evaluation indicators; and methods & techniques to improve accountability and transparency.

5. Establish a functionally effective private-public partnership regime to improve "process management" in the delivery of basic education by the private sector.

I would request the actors in both public and private sectors to demonstrate their commitment by initiating concrete actions instead of words to help prepare new generation(s) with quality basic education to impact on poverty.

Karim M. Iqbal
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Interpretation of Islam

My attention has been drawn to an article (DS 27/4, "Fiddling While Bangladesh Burns" by Naeem Mohaemine). It has become a trend among the western media to invent varied kind of Muslims like fundamentalists, moderates, practising Muslims etc. and certain people from this very community have not lagged far behind from their western gurus.

One can be prosecuted in any of the so-called western country for blasphemy if his/her writings are found to be hurting the Christian belief. It rather amazes me when I see that most of the world literature are written along the lines of religious preaching, and interestingly when you read Milton's "Paradise Lost" or Goethe's "Faust" or even the Mahakabyas (based on Hindu mythology) in our own language, they are regarded as literary milestones but when one writes something along the Islamic ideals, it either does not qualify as a piece of literature or regarded as a publication of the fundamentalists. Even the world's greatest art works like "The Last Supper" are based on Christian belief, not to mention the great sculptures in India derived from Hindu culture.

So writers should think critically about the issue before committing themselves to a particular position.

Khandaker R Zaman
Dhaka

A timely commentary

I am a regular reader of your esteemed newspaper and never miss your commentary. They are wonderful. I am delighted to read your today's (27.04.004) commentary. I appreciate your truthfulness.

Please keep writing about the burning issues of our society.

Jamshed, Banani, Dhaka

My heartfelt thanks to you for writing a very bold and straight forward commentary, questioning the PM "Do you really believe what you said?" It describes the current political scenario in a very clear manner. The sooner our leaders take lesson from it, the better for our people.

Since 1991, we have been governed by fully democratic legitimate governments, but still we are frustrated in every aspect. People have been suffering due to continuous anti-people steps of the government.

MS Uddin, Kyoto, Japan

What is happening?

When I first heard that the veteran Awami leader had declared the fall of government by 30 April, I was very surprised. Because on this very day, the world's greatest tyrant, Adolf Hitler, was eliminated from power. Will it be a cautionary signal for the government?

The resistance to the oppressive measures is very much weak. I wonder what will happen to this beleaguered nation.

Arman Khan
Tejgaon, Farmgate, Dhaka



Sharon: A serial killer

Imagine a world where serial killers are set free and enjoy all the amenities of life. They name their next victims publicly and assassinate them. They are respected and praised for their deeds and live as national heroes. Outrageous, isn't it?

Now please stop imagining, because we are living in this very world. Yassin's

blood is still fresh on the hands of Sharon, yet he has got another victim, Rantissi. Even a compulsive serial killer might think twice before claiming another life so soon. Sharon is doing all these just for 'self-defence' against the 'ticking bomb' which is well endorsed by the White House.

If Sharon has the right of

self-defence, so have the Hamas.

The international community is always vocal against the 'terrorist' activities of the 'Islamist elements'. Does it have the guts to accuse Sharon of serial killing and crime against humanity?

Saif

Dhaka

A nation of lawbreakers

Newspaper reports say 159 law-makers have been found defaulting on Tk 8.61 crore in outstanding phone bills. If the lawmakers become lawbreakers, the fate of the ordinary people cannot be safe in their hands. Every citizen of this country knows that the MPs belong to the most privileged class. If they violate the rules and regulations of the land, then what is wrong with the uneducated and unprivileged class of mass people following the examples set by the parliamentarians?

Can't our parliament enact a law barring defaulters, of any kind, from seeking election to the JS or any other public office?

Mir Jahanara Afreen (Enitha)

Gossai Jowair, Tangail

DS-CAMPE roundtable on basic education

I read with great interest the special supplement of The Daily Star, 27 April 2004 issue on Daily Star and CAMPE sponsored roundtable on the role of private sector in local resource mobilisation for basic education. The distinguished participants highlighted the issues and concerns, but they did not actually reflect the interests of the end-users.

Bangladesh has successfully maintained the top position in the list

strategy to generate resources for the benefit of a larger number of students, but the conditions on ground are different. Such private sector school initiatives are purely business motivated, and they find education as a means to exploit the rich people. On the other hand, the poor people are reportedly exploited by many private voluntary organisations, which receive funds from (foreign) donor agencies as well as the government to operate (mostly) non-formal schools.

In the end, the issues and concerns boil down to "governance". The government may have a policy (or, policy guidelines), but it is not working simply because the tools and the supporting methods & techniques to improve quality, accountability and transparency in the delivery of basic education are largely non-existent. Under these conditions, higher budgetary allocations will only encourage further inefficiency and corruption. The situation cannot be changed overnight, but actions to improve the conditions are needed:

1. Provide guidelines, with (measurable) standards for the private sector to establish new schools; and also to continue the existing schools.

2. Provide specific guidelines for the schools to mobilise resources and establish international partnerships.

3. Establish a new generation of chartered teacher training institutes to produce qualified teachers.

History teaches nothing?

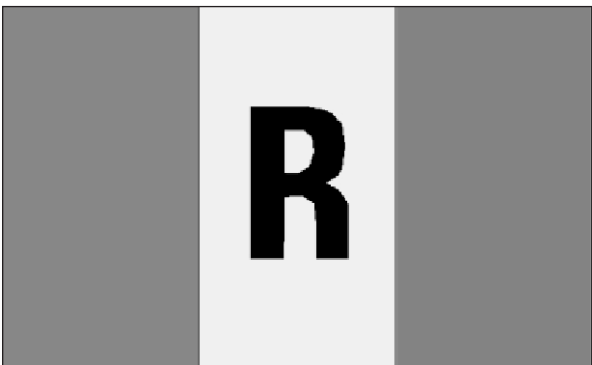


It is really a funny thing that we all know the history, but we can't take any lesson from our historical mistakes. We know the history of Greece, Rome, Turkey, Persia, Britain, Germany etc. We know what they were and how they are! There is no doubt that they ruled this beautiful earth in a cruel way. But now the rulers are part of history. Cruelty is 'saved' by history. And history remembers them for their cruelty. Nobody, no power can change this rule. We all know these facts.

Then why do we make mistakes?

The most brilliant brains of the world are working with the US government! Why are they advising the US to throw cluster bombs on the helpless and defenceless people of Afghanistan and Iraq? Don't they know history? Or do they think this is the way by which they can dominate forever?

Golam Mortaza
Centre for Policy dialogue (CPD)
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka



Rwandan apocalypse: 100 days of slaughter

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of Rwandan genocide, one should not forget that due to lack of action on the part of the international community and its failure to stop the massacre, 800,000 men, women and children perished within a span of 100 days.

The Rwandan genocide once again proved that men are worse than beasts. What a pity that ethnicity did not yield to nationhood. Instead of mourn-

ing the assassination of President of Rwanda together with the President of Brunei the night began with 100 days of terror and sadistic killing in full view of the world with hate propaganda fuelled by the media.

What happened in Rwanda was the result of a long history of neo-colonial policy. The Hutu-Tutsi relationship was turned into a class system. The minority Tutsi (14%) were favoured

over Hutu (85%) and both Rwanda and Burundi were governed by two Tutsi monarchs and the Tutsis were given privileges and western style education. A further divide was created by the introduction of ethnic identity cards differentiating Hutus from Tutsis.

A decade after, one needs to reflect on what went wrong. Had the Security Council acted differently, the genocide could

have been prevented. Due to the UN mandate, its forces stood as silent spectators as the killings took place. The UN stands for human rights, for freedom, for justice, for peace and when the passionate voices call in distress in the midst of a tragedy, the UN must respond to save human lives, no matter how formidable the challenge.

Syeda Akhtar (RN)