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History, Art and Culture.

It is a matter of grave concern that our "disappointed, but not broken-hearted" candidate is making rash comments about his defeat and other issues to different news agencies, which will be on the record. Did not the foreign ministry brief him about the diplomatic norms?

The present government has failed terribly in handling foreign affairs in general. Bangladesh is on the terrorist list and now in the blacklist for the trafficking of women and children not to mention our label as the world's most corrupt country.

There must be some competent people in the ruling party to take good care of foreign affairs. Foreign affairs will always be a delicate issue. Here the government cannot get away with cursing the opposition party. I hope the think tank (if there is any such thing) in the ruling party will take pragmatic steps to control the damage already done to the image of Bangladesh.

Saf

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#### Calling the politicians

As an elderly citizen, I would like to ask our super-active politicians some nasty questions. No point in being polite, as this elusive virtue has not yet taken root in the political culture, the way mud-slinging is practiced in and out of the House. The air is filled with poison. Some ambitions are negatively motivated, and only money can act as appeasement (it seems).

Tell us if we hold wrong views. Correct us, not with *danda*, *lathi*, and guns, but with tolerance, patience, and understanding. Did we elect the wrong representatives? Is there a lack of institutional support? Why can't you set it right? It is what you have been elected to do. We look up to you, and you look down upon us! We do not even get 100 per cent freedom. Since the general elections in the early '90s you have been making our daily lives miserable. Sort out your problems in the parliament, and do not wash dirty linen in public.

Surely it is our fault (60 million adult citizens), as we are not cultured enough to decipher the lofty philosophy of our hardened and mature political leaders, who can easily find fault with their opposing leaders. Cultivate the fluidity of water, or the brittleness of crushed stones? A rolling stone gathers no moss. Our politicians have no time to spare outside politics—all citizens and voters are not politicians.

What is your indoctrination program, hidden or open? We must understand it, otherwise how can we support you? But why coercion is being used? Today's politics is based on terrorism and violence. No other option? We are by nature docile and pleasant, but why we Bangladeshis have suddenly become violent and intolerance rules the day? Of course it is our weakness. Please define "our" -- who are not included?

I can continue with many more questions, which are haunting the public minds, but it is better to wait for the reaction.

AMahasan

Dhaka

## Whither the middle class?

Is our middle class disappearing, and nobody minds? Today, this section of the society has been so marginalised that it can hardly provide the background scenario, which is so essential in a free, developing nation.

It seems that the government (or is it the parliament without MPs?) has to take notice and cover this endangered species through various thrust projects. We are more concerned with garbage poly bags and other natural environmental issues, blissfully ignoring the human side of the equation. Approach the political pundits? They are not religious, secular, or atheist -- a cult difficult to fathom. We cannot live with them, or without them!

Looking after the decadent middle class *bhadralokh* and *bhadramohila* is good future investment, although not in monetary terms. The reasons for this lukewarm patronisation have to be spelled out for public awareness. They need a living wage to maintain their simple life-style. No better human computer than a genuine, informed, artless *Bangalee* mind, sharp as a razor, and blunt as a hammer. Plain living and high thinking is out of fashion.

The middle class acts as a buffer and catalyst between the rich and the poor, and serve as the mirror of the nation in times of stress, distress, or euphoria. They are the faithful managing agent of the leisure hour activities of the society, as culture can be a leisure-hour pastime. Inside culture there are many schools of thought, which need neutral and dedicated custodians to preserve the national heritage and absorb both global and local changes, maintaining the continuity for national identity.

Who are the custodians of the national institutions? Not the money-making class, or the toiling masses. The latter needs feedback from the higher levels, which is communicated by the middle class, who are able to explain professional technicalities in layman's terms. They level out economic and other disparity gaps.

Today, self-centred interests are taking precedence over public interests. When money moves fast, culture acts as a tortoise. This beast of burden is humped with obligations. Our national leaders are so busy with housekeeping errands that there is no time for monitoring the background chores, which keep national institutions in good shape. The spotlight is on the front stage, but the sustainability comes from the workers in the invisible background.

No formal studies have been publicised on the migration from the middle class; one upwards, voluntarily and recklessly; and the other down (helplessly). The middle class core is being eroded. It is the merciless social environmental effect. No foreign aid or assistance is applicable here to remedy this national misfortune. Self-help is not enough for the take-off.

Look at this old quotation: "I beg, to remain, Sir, your most obedient servant." The modern bureaucrats have done away with this closing salutation; for the sake of enjoying freedom of the new, free kingdom. How to "enjoy" freedom?

**AMawaz**  
Dhaka

## AL joins parliament

AL sobered up by returning to parliament. Not so long ago, it was apparent that they oscillated between joining parliament and adopting a hard-line policy. Hopefully, they will concur by taking part in upcoming Gazipur by-election, participating in parliamentary committees and sharing seats for women MPs. In parliamentary democracy, undoubtedly, opposition plays a vital role

and without them, the circle is never completed. Moreover, people expect to be represented at parliament through their delegates. Therefore let's congratulate AL, and Sheikh Hasina in particular, for taking the decision. Though in our political culture, hartal is the major weapon used by the opposition to protest the misdeeds of government, it disorganises life of common

people, plunges down production, and ultimately damages the economy. Besides, Bangladesh is a poor, developing country; colossal losses caused by hartal is unbearable for her. So, hartal culture must be superseded. Print and electronic media could be a more effective alternative to protest besides the parliament.

**Nasir Uddin Roney**  
Dept of Anthropology, The University of Chittagong

with formalin. Fruit sellers also use different kinds of toxic chemicals and our future generation would be the first affected group of these chemically ripened fruits.

Among all these alarming news I appreciate those people who are playing their role against the poisonous pesticides. Nature friendly "Pheromone Trap" will not only ensure our good health but it will also save a huge amount of money every year. Now is the time to convey the message of this movement to all farmers. Our government has to help these farmers after the experiment period by providing the pheromone chemical when it won't be available. I also propose to governments' think tank to draw up strict laws to prevent harvesting of chemically ripened foods and

preserved fish. Here, media must do its job by creating awareness among the people. Because, we want our future generation to grow up in a toxic-free Bangladesh.

**Rizwan-ul Huq**  
KU

#### Poor show in OIC

Bangladesh conceded a shocking defeat in the run for the post of secretary-general in the OIC. Our candidate, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, ended up with only 12 votes. The Tk 20 crore used in the last year and a half for an "organised, concentrated, and sustained campaign" to gain support from the key countries all went down the drain.

The crux of the problem lies in the selection of the candidate. I am sure we have lots of qualified per-

sons with vast experience both in domestic and international arena. It seems sycophancy is the only criterion that was taken into account -- Otherwise a person with such little experience in diplomacy and a questionable past could never overshadow an eligible candidate.

The much-talked about image of Bangladesh got another blow through the selection of a controversial candidate. How could Bangladesh even think of winning such an important post with such a candidate? What about the huge amount of money spent on it?

The deserving candidate has been elected in the OIC voting.

Ihsanoglu, a 61-year-old Turkish historian, has served as director general of the Istanbul-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference Research Centre for Islamic

#### AlJazeera

We need men with moral courage to speak and write their real thought, and to stand by their convictions, even to the very death'

- Thomas Paine (1870)

While watching CNN or BBC, the shoddy propaganda becomes immediately transparent. In the good old days when US used to tell a lie, it would stick to it for a long time. Not any more thanks to alternative information channel like Al-Jazeera, the Qatar based TV station who bring in diverse range of opinion and images unimaginable only a decade ago.

Launched in 1996 by a group of disillusioned BBC journalists, it receives funding from the Qatari Crown prince, Emir al-Thani and reaches over 35 million homes daily

and is one of the most successful news service.

Of all the major global networks, Al-Jazeera has been alone in proclaiming that the Iraq war should be viewed as an illegal enterprise. It has broadcast the horror of the bombing campaign, the screaming infants and the corpses. Al-Jazeera has painted a powerful picture of western media's double standards.

The British media condemned Al-Jazeera's decision to screen a video clip of two dead British soldiers but did not think twice before showing images of dead, captured or humiliated Iraqi soldiers.

But there are risks too. Al-Jazeera journalists and their organisation had been targeted many times. Extreme pressure was placed on the channel to show

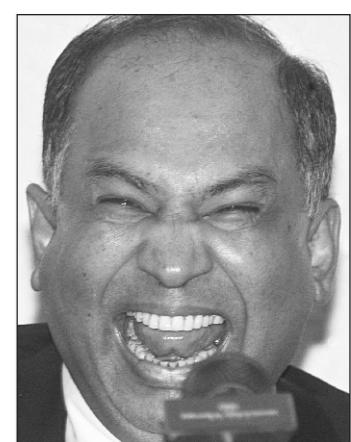
more positive image of the Iraq occupation. In fact the Qatar government was requested to control the channel. It would be unimaginable to have any other country's government complaining about the CNN's coverage.

Washington keeps saying that it wants to encourage democratisation in the Middle East but attempts to throttle Al-Jazeera certainly indicates otherwise.

Recently the release of Al-Jazeera's film Control Room has made box office record in the US. This only proves that propaganda approach is losing its effectiveness because it has become the victim of its own spin.

**Syeda Akhtar (RN)**  
One-mail

## A welcome defeat



SQ Chowdhury's failure to become the Secretary-General of OIC has been a blessing in disguise for Bangladesh and for the Muslim world as a whole. There is no doubt about it. The whole country watched and heard how despicable, rotten and irresponsible a person could be when he made such comments about Suranjan Sengupta and Sheikh Hasina on his arrival at the airport. But the most painful part of this drama was the presence of the Foreign Minister there and his complete silence. This is a shame for us that a tainted person like him was chosen by our leader to represent Bangladesh in the OIC. What kind of mentality this administration has shown by nominating this parasite is well understandable.

**Mir Rashid**  
On e-mail

## Our Inhumanity

Gunpowder was kept inside a bus to kill some innocent people who never thought of becoming victims of somebody's ambush and assault. Nine people died on the spot and death toll rose to ten as another victim died in the hospital later. But they should not have died. They were victims of someone's plot to show that the country is in a mess (this country is in fact in such a state but this is not the way to show it). They had to die for someone's ill will to create anarchy. They had to die for our politicians' cruel antipathy towards one another.

How inhuman could one be that somebody actually put gunpowder in a public bus? The government did not even declare it a national tragedy! Our national flag was not kept half mast. The countrymen did not wear a black badge to show sympathy. No special prayer was arranged for the victims at the mosques, temples or churches. Life is going on as it was before. The government and the opposition continue to blame each other. And we are watching the sickening game with a frightening ease.

**Mahfuzul Haque**  
Dept of English, DU

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## By-election: Message for EC

The by-election in Munshiganj-1 held on June 6 left some messages for the Election Commission and the Chief Election Commissioner in particular. The following day report in the dailies, especially in the Daily Star stated large scale rigging, threats and coercion by the adherents of the party in power and alleged abetting in those by few of the presiding/polling and law enforcement officials. Sheer deceit in constitutional duties! Even wholesale politicisation of the administration and the police could not help reap the reward, for the voters turned their back!

Reports said that the polling centres of Kolapara Union were taken control of and that the casting of false votes were freely done, both by the supporters of BNP candidate in presence of polling and law enforcement officials. At Shamsabad, BNP supporters and police chased Bikalpa Dhara supporters out of the polling centre, and written complaint to that effect was spurned by the Returning Officer. "BNP men were casting fake votes since morning, but they were helpless to act", said a law enforcement officer on duty at a primary school, and an Ansar said to the journalists, "Sir, they came here to cast vote for the fifth time", quoted the report as saying.

To scare away minority voters, a popular Hindu primary school teacher Sunil Sarker was picked up from his home at 5pm the day before and was detained for the whole election day without any charge against him. The picture of detained Sunil Sarker on the front page of the Daily Star escaped nobody's attention and a photo in journalistic parlance tells more than what thousands words do. Another local leader Abdul Kader

was also detained for he was to mobilise voters in favour of Bikalpa Dhara candidate. Besides beating up of a 80 year old man, one Gazi Shahidul Huq and his co-activists were forced by BNP men to leave a polling centre without casting vote, and in drawing attention of the presiding officer to that, he said he had nothing to do. Do you call this election fair and free -- whoever won the fray? If the election commis-

sion as is constitutionally bound to stage a free and fair election, it must have taken note of the above violations of election code of conduct and short shrifts, and it must show guts to redress them.

The by-election in Munshiganj is an eye opener for the Election Commission as far as the upcoming by-election in Dhaka is concerned. Bikalpa Dhara candidate has already accused the ruling BNP activists of not allowing his

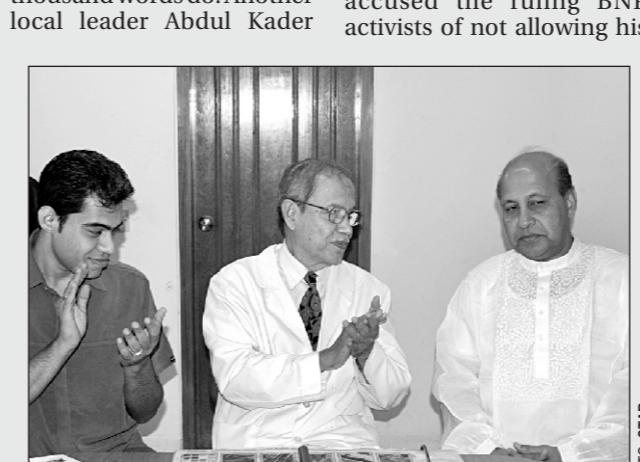


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the memories of Magura election. That may blow the citizens' head with unpredictable consequences.

**AH Dewan**  
Dhaka

## Attack on victory procession

The dirty side of our politics was once again visible during the horrendous attack on victory procession at Munshiganj constituency. As per our constitution, Mahi B Chowdhury has democratic right to celebrate his party's victory in a peaceful manner. But under the paws of dirty politics, some jealous opponents crushed that right. Through committing the illegal act they not only violated the constitution, but also took the life of an innocent supporter. It is not only shocking, but despicable also.

Government should take the matter seriously and bring the criminals immediately to the book. Our expectation is that the aggravating scenario of our current political arena must be controlled before it goes beyond redemption. Because repercussions of constant unstable politics can only bring darkness to the future of the country and to some extent make it worse than before.

**Tawhidur Rahman**  
BUET

## Bus Arson--was it fait accompli?

Ten people were burnt to death by some clandestine killers who have no respect for people's lives. But why did they face such brutal deaths? Our leaders have to reply today or tomorrow. Just ceremonial visitation after an accident or death to shed crocodile tears would not suffice the sufferings and irreparable loss of the families of those who become

victims of such unfortunate, senseless attack on human lives. Whether explosives were thrown from outside or already there inside -- is not the real question here! The brutal fact is ten solid lives were lost because of senseless and unworthy motives of some criminal minds. Who can replace or compensate their lives? Neither the government nor the opposition. They have been telling us that it was done to create anarchy, whereas till today the authorities have no clue to the motive or could identify the perpetrators. I know there will be no trace of the assassins as usual and the blame game between the government and the opposition will continue.

**A F Rahman**  
Via e-mail