

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.

Politics with strange philosophy



PHOTO: AFP

I live in Texas and frequently visit the Daily Star webpage. While reading an article today about the ridiculous tiff between the BNP and the AL regarding who made the independence call, I realised that it is possible that we will never be able to understand how these people actually "think". I would like to ask the people engaged in this argument the following questions:

1) Do you realise that it has been reported on the BBC that millions of Bangladeshis have been left homeless and possibly without food and water because of the recent floods? Do you seriously think it is so important to those people, who at this very moment are without shelter, food, water, etc. that Sheikh Mujib or Ziaur Rahman declared independence?

2) Do you realise that Bangladesh has been ranked first among the most corrupt countries in the world? I challenge you to explain to the rest of the world that you couldn't pay attention to all the corruption because you had more important matters to settle: who made the call for independence 33 years ago?

There are so many more things I could ask, I could just go on and on. However, I really want our politicians to reflect on these issues.

A Bangladeshi
US

Declaration of independence

I read with interest Dr. Kamal Hossain's article "The debate on the declaration of independence" (DS July 14th). Regrettably, the author has failed to make the controversy any less controversial and has added nothing new to convince anyone that Sheikh Mujib, prior to his arrest, made the Declaration.

He has named Dr. Kamal Hossain, Mr. Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir and Mr. Taufique Imam to back the claim for this Declaration. All three have reasons to back the claim. The fact is there is no independent proof from neutral sources to back the claim that Sheikh Mujib made a Declaration of Independence on 25th March 1971, except those whose names have been quoted in the article under reference. Their statements cannot be taken as authentic proof of the Declaration for the reasons stated above. We must not forget that in Dhaka that day, there were many journalists, even a few foreign ones, and none of them reported

about this historic Declaration.

The problem with our War of Liberation is a simple one. The people fought it and the credit has gone to those who left us before the marauding Pakistan army began its genocide. It is no wonder therefore that we have this controversy over this Declaration, for with this, those who fled from us at our hour of peril, want to cover part of their failure.]

However, the emergence of Bangladesh is the best thing that has happened to us and we have Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib to thank for giving us the courage for fighting for our liberation. The war was fought in his name and he was our inspiration. The controversy does not concern him for one thing or now would ever think of placing him at the same pedestal as others whose names have been dragged to this controversy. It is this post fact management by a political party to derive the benefit from this Declaration that has forced others, many others, to lend credence to the opposing view. The bottom line is for

a large number of the people of Bangladesh, the 1971 Bangabandhu and the Awami League are not synonymous.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

Travelling to America

I would like to offer a tip about dealing with US airport security. But first I must mention that I was appalled to learn that prominent actor Ramendu Majumdar had to endure the harrowing predicament he describes in his letter to the editor (July 2, 2004). Any security personnel in any country with the slightest common sense and decency should have realised immediately that Mr. Majumdar doesn't match the so-called "terrorist" profile and should not be harassed.

I've had similar experiences at US airports on numerous occasions. I can still picture the anxious face of an elderly Arab gentleman in Houston who missed his flight because he had been escorted to a "glass booth" (awaiting further INS prying). Personally, I've learned that empathy

works really well with American immigration officers. I remember one time I was led to the back office for further "processing". I noticed the engagement ring on one of the officers and started a conversation with her about her wedding plans. She let me go surprisingly fast. Another time, I told an official dejectedly, as I handed him my papers, "I think... I just missed my flight" (because I had been kept in aforementioned "glass booth" for a while). He told me "I'll make sure you don't miss your flight," and he did. Another time, an officer let me go behind his desk and look at all the photos and fingerprints of me that the INS computer database had.

US immigration officers are usually underpaid and often come from marginalised American minorities, and a little empathy works wonders on them. In my opinion, America is like an ocean wave -- it is best to learn to ride the wave than to be swept away by its destructive power. In conclusion, I'd like to mention that I loved Mr. Majumdar in "Meraj Fakir Ma" and hope to catch another one of his plays soon.

Jonathan Adhikari
Texas, USA

Call of Independence

I am writing this in reference to your news article captioned "PM questions Mujib's Independence Call". Thirty-three years have passed since the country gained independence and I am quite certain that over these years the charm and vanity of independence has worn off for many ordinary people in the face of rising poverty, lawlessness and lack of opportunity for leading a decent life. The ordinary, hapless people of Bangladesh no longer care about who declared their independence because they cannot relate to it anymore. How can a nation be truly independent if the identity of the leader(s) is a foregone conclusion? How can a nation be truly independent if the leader of the ruling party is not selected on the basis of vision, leadership and merit but on the basis of family line of succession? We all know who the PM is going to be if either of the two party wins the next or any forthcoming election. Don't we? I really cannot figure out how can anybody think about independence in a country where monarchy reigns in the form

of democracy, where the parliament works just to pad the ego of the leader.

It is indeed a shame that our leaders are still fighting over their respective families' contribution to independence, when the very existence of our independence is in question.

Anwar Babar
Dallas, Texas, USA

DS reporting

The DS is 'Committed to People's Right to Know' as per your newspaper's motto. But 'People's Right to Know' is repeatedly infringed on when important events are not given due coverage. The DS failed to give as much coverage to the PM's speech given in the concluding budget session of the JS as to the opposition leader's given in the same session. Is the leader of the opposition more important a figure than the prime minister?

We know the DS, like other dailies, has its own way of supporting a particular cause, but that should not be reflected in hard news.

Dewan G Ahmed
Dhaka

On absenteeism in hospitals

In the early 80's, I had a posting as medical officer in rural Sylhet. It was very difficult to leave the comfort of intern Hostel and the comfort of friendship that I was blessed with over a span of six long years. Yet the time came and I parted. I joined there at a remote Thana Health Complex. No, none was waiting there to greet a new doc just out from the school. The senior medical officer (administrator of the complex) was nowhere to be found. There was no place to sleep or no desk to sit and work. It was made abundantly clear that the senior doctor shall not mind at all if I were AWOL (absent without leave). I collected a few personal letters from the non-existent office and left the post of my first employment (!) without even seeing my immediate superior. I was young. My heart was yearning to go back to the city. I did not feel bad at my dereliction. In fact I was happy!

Now 20 years later as I remember those days, my heart wells up with shame and sadness. Sometimes I try to understand and explain. I just,

however, can not explain without being even more shamelessly defensive! And for that I seek pardon in advance.

Except for a few bright and honest men, most of the garden-variety types are the product of our own milieu. Absenteeism in rural medical centres is rampant in South Asia. Well, does this exonerate me of my failure? I was a thoughtful college graduate at that time. I knew the difference between right and wrong. No, these justifications definitely do not exonerate my guilt.

Mohammad A Zaman
US

Bureaucrats above law?

The news item (July 14) only goes to show how egoistic our civil servants have become. They on their own have made themselves neither civil (in their thoughts, words and deeds) nor servant to any one be it the court, the people or their elected representatives. They adore their VIP position, and no one can shake them from that. However, there are a

few notable exceptions that can possibly be counted by the index finger among the thousands of self-anointed VIPs.

They feel themselves above any stature to directly respond to an enquiry even by an Honourable Judge about their incompetence. They prefer written notes, monologues and dictates with ample time to create enough smoke screen to hide behind. They are not ready or possibly not competent to give a direct correct answer to a Judge, for they feel they are above judgement!

The bureaucratic approach in getting everyone to toe their line and passing the buck around is well documented in the famous book "Yes Minister", and even in this legal enquiry they are trying to pussyfoot around their responsibility. As Dr. Kamal Hossain rightly points out, "VIP does not exist in the eyes of the law where all are equal". However our bureaucrats consider themselves first among the equals!

Acitizen
One-mail

Tale of a city

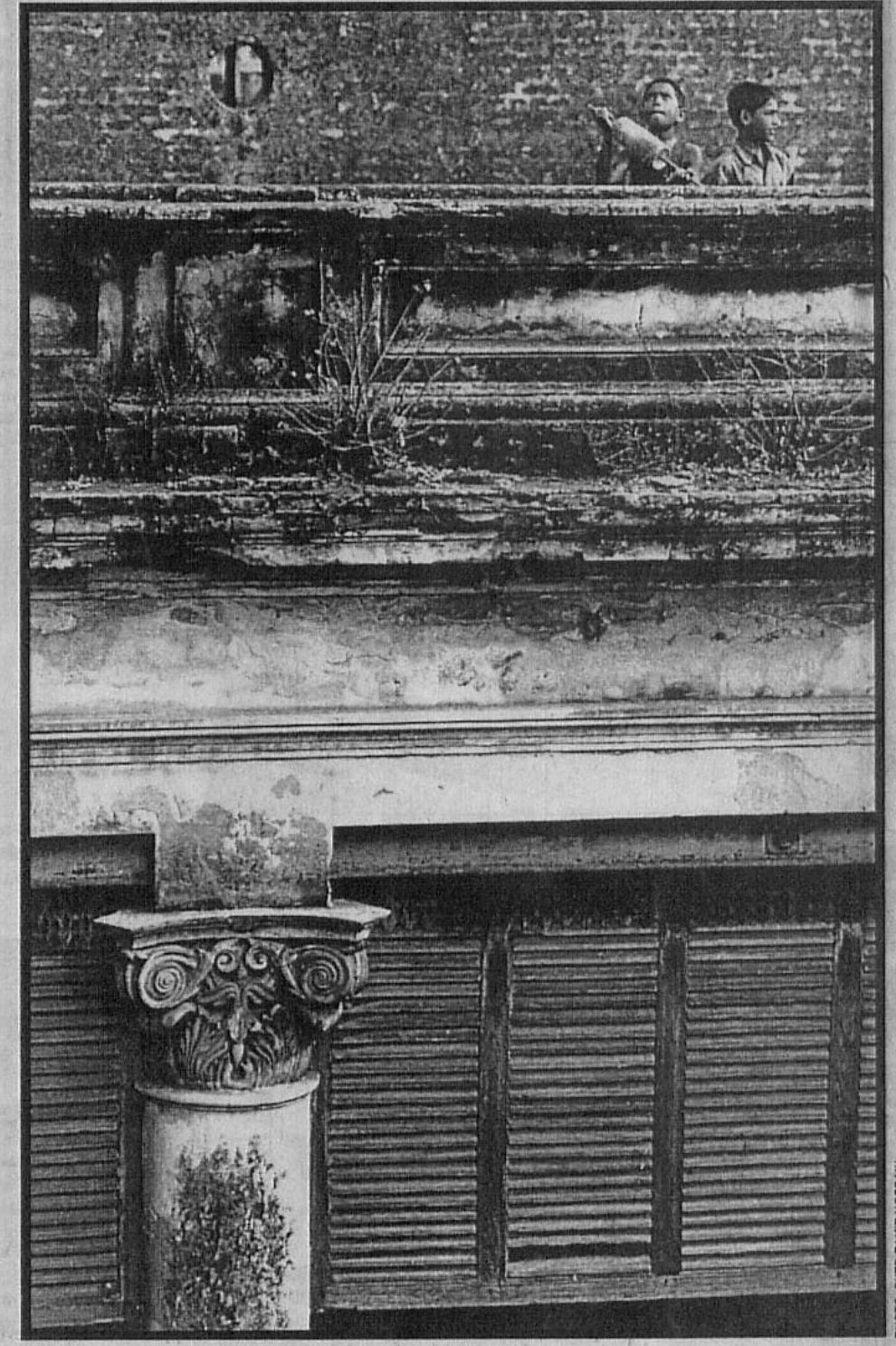


PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Dhaka is an old city but we are not watching any attempt to preserve its heritage. Right now, Rajuk and the City Corporation should take a two-prong initiative. Their first objective should be identifying the dilapidated buildings for demolition, refurbishment or restoration and their next objective should be removing the illegal structures from this city to beautify it. They know all these processes but only the right spirit is missing!

It is no secret that unhygienic and unscientific build-ups affect both human health and mind, and, therefore, for the sake of the city dwellers' welfare, my solemn begging to the authorities concerned is: please take quick measures to give this city its due structure. I am looking forward to seeing a beautiful Dhaka where history mingles with modernity.

Tawhid Shams Chowdhury
BRAC University, Dhaka

Charity begins...

Finance minister Saifur Rahman is leaving no stone unturned in his efforts to squeeze out revenue from the unfortunate sections of society, and bring transparency to the system. The public is frequently admonished by this outspoken minister for corruption and other acts of tax avoidance. The finance minister's efforts would be considered meaningful if he could do the housecleaning task at home. The first step should be to publish a complete list of assets (local and overseas) of his party leaders, and demonstrate that these have been earned honestly, reported and taxed according to the rules.

Simple statements like "I am proud of my son" in parliament doesn't sound convincing. The finance minister should face facts. We are sick and tired of the stigma of the "most corrupt country in the world".

Abu Naser, Shamsul Haq
Hong Kong



July 4

PHOTO: AFP

The cost was great... the effort was immense... the public display was truly colourful -- shrouded in the colours of the star spangled banner... the activities were diverse and fun-filled... the participation was overwhelming with people from all backgrounds and culture.

Yes, this was the celebration of US Independence Day. No doubt a rousing, patriotic speech had been composed for the US President, George Bush, reminding the nation of American history and the pride and sacrifice that America's forefathers undertook for values like liberty, freedom and democracy.

However, such planning and expectation for 4th July did not hide from the American people a clear sense of unease, fear, insecurity and trepidation. Whilst the Department of Homeland Security was expected to issue terrorist plot warnings, Mr Bush talked up the US offensive dealing with international terrorism in order to safeguard America and the whole world.

And suddenly the gloss was taken off all the celebrations and the inhibitions of the local American became apparent. Though 9/11 forced America to review and strengthen domestic security, the increasing spotlight and public awareness that has arisen about the very real 'dark side' of US foreign and domestic policy has made many Americans review their national pride and patriotism.

Distinct communities in America, like the Hispanic and black communities, ponder on the constant discrimination and wealth disparity that they still face. The so-called notion of the 'land of milk and honey' is now seen as the poison chalice.

Other communities, like those from South America and Africa ponder on the economic and political destruction of the countries they left, at the hands of a vicious and materialistic American foreign policy and US multinationals that suck and exploit the local economies.

Other communities like those from the Arab world ponder over the destruction of the social foundation of their 'mother' countries, characterised by family break-ups, increased crime and moral fragmentation resulting from the influx of American 'western' culture that invades the lives of all through Hollywood, MTV, internet and the like.

Still other communities like those who left Afghanistan and Somalia to live in America ponder over the physical invasion of their countries, the blood of their people and the dishonouring of their women... by the US on the pretext of introducing freedom, democracy and stability to the country and the region.

Communities like those from Iraq see the violation of their religion and the desecration of their religious symbols and buildings under the command of the US military.

There are those communities like those from Palestine who ponder over the US protection, support and green light to inhumane and illegitimate states like Israel to occupy and force their family and people out of their lands.

Tanveer
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Dhaka can now proudly boast itself as the "city of banners and festoons". The city is virtually engulfed with numerous outdated, old, tattered, discoloured and obnoxious banners and festoons. These posters/banners include those of pre-cadet/kindergarten coaching, beauty parlour, herbal skin care, restaurants, clinics, information about public meetings, political killings, doa mehfil, admission to various institutes, job information and what not. These are to be found almost everywhere, across the city roads, road islands, city parks, markets, bus terminals, railway stations, launch terminals, movie houses, educational institutions, private buildings etc. Even the walls and corridors of government offices including the secretariat are not spared.

The removal of these posters has economic implications as well. These posters/banners give the entire city a dirty look.

Of banners and festoons



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

They often obliterate the address as well as the beauty of the buildings. The nailing of such banners to trees deprives us of the beauty of the greenery. Recently, the poster of an MP aspirant has been pasted almost at every possible place. Now that the election is over, who is going to remove it?

In no capital city of the world is the law so flexible and democratic to allow the indiscriminate display of banners and posters. I believe our City Corporation has the necessary laws to act effectively against such violation of law.

As for the removal of banners and festoons, all that is required is a pair of scissors and the will to act. This is not too much of asking from our city fathers. We all love our city and would like to see it grow as a clean, green and healthy one.

Shamim Ahmed
One-mail