

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.



Eid shopping

While reading the 8 November issue of Prothom Alo on line, one news item about Eid Shopping immediately drew my attention. It has been mentioned that a woman dress called "Lahanga" was sold at Tk. 300,000 and sarees are being sold at prices up to Tk.200,000.

This is unthinkable to me. Could Bangladesh people afford to buy these costly dresses to celebrate Eid? To celebrate Eid do we not need to wear expensive dresses. Rather, the money could be used to help the munga-hit people in the northern region.

SM Khaleque Zaman
Kabul, Afghanistan

yes, this is year 2004, and all this is happening under the very nose of the UN and the 'peace-loving' international community.

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Balanced view

It was nice to see that The Daily Star decided to take a fair and balanced view of US politics. It was really disturbing to read some of the commentaries, which were very similar to the propaganda materials of the religious bigots. The bottom line is that war is evil and you do not have to support the war, you also do not have to feel sorry for Americans who were victims of terrorist attacks. But, you cannot support people who are against moral values and individual freedom.

Bangladeshis don't have much to be proud of, but we are proud of our conservative social values that keep our society together.

Mahmud Zaman
One-mail

A social nuisance

Beggars pestering city dwellers have become a common sight. The first shocking sights after landing at the airport are the malnourished disabled beggars. In front of government offices, educational institutions, movie houses, public markets, railway stations, bus terminals, playgrounds and in all busy road intersections, beggars are to be found. They have become a social nuisance. Nowhere in the world are

should set up rehabilitation centres at the district level for the rehabilitation of the disabled beggars. The centres should manage treatment as well as provide income generation training schemes for the disabled. The goal is not difficult to achieve. We have everything in place. An initiative in the right direction is all that is needed.

Shamim Ahmed
Mymensingh Road,
Bangla Motor, Dhaka

Flip side

I think we have had enough of one Bin Laden. People who think that Karzai and Alawi are just puppets and aren't standing up for Muslim rights are plainly wrong. We may not like what Bush has done to these two countries, but for the greater good, we need to support Karzai and Alawi to succeed in building a better future for their people. Japan and Germany are the perfect examples of American occupation and success. We can scream and cry but nothing will bring back Osama or Saddam to power. If anybody thinks that Osama's and Saddam's fiery words would bring back the glorious days of Islam, they are going to be disappointed.

It's no secret that the West has become powerful by cultivating science and knowledge. Until and unless we face this reality and address our shortcomings, we can't fight the West.

Dev Saha
One-mail

Bush wins

President Bush's massive win, both in terms of the popular vote and the Republican gains in Congress, is nothing short of a watershed for the Democratic Party at large and progressives in particular. Despite having a vast array of issues that should have transcended any personal flaws in John Kerry's candidacy, we could not topple Bush. This time the election was not stolen as it was in 2000; rather, the Democrats were beaten badly despite the tireless efforts of millions of campaign workers, donors, volunteers and voters.

It may be that progressives holed up in urban areas in the northeast, midwest and west coast in the US have lost touch with mainstream America, which increasingly means the conservative Christian right. The rise of the Christian right and its neo-conservative agenda has been in the making for decades, but ironically has only been accelerated recently by the onslaught of Islamic fundamentalism.

People in Bangladesh and all over the Muslim world may hate Bush and his ill-advised war in Iraq, but their continued silent acceptance of Islamic fundamentalism only serves to push America further to the right.

Rafiq Ahmed
Chicago, US



Reality today

Today we have taller buildings and wider highways, but shorter temperaments and narrower points of view. We spend more, but enjoy less. We have more compromises, but less time. We have more knowledge, but less judgement. We have more medicines, but less health. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk much, we love only a little, and we hate too much. We reached the Moon and came back, but we find it troublesome to cross our own street and meet our neighbours. We have conquered the outer space, but not our inner space. We have higher income, but less morals. These are times with more liberty, but less joy. We have much more food, but less nutrition. These are the days in which it takes two salaries for each home, but divorces increase. These are times of finer houses, but more broken homes. That's why I propose, that as of today, you do not keep anything for a special occasion, because every day that you live is a special occasion. Search for knowledge, read more, sit on your front porch and admire the view without paying attention to your needs. Spend more time with your family and friends, eat your favourite foods, visit the places you love. Life is a chain of moments of enjoyment; not only about survival. Do not save your best perfume, and use it every time you feel you want it. Remove from your vocabulary phrases like 'one of these days' and 'someday'. Let's write that letter we thought of writing 'one of these days'. Let's tell our families and friends how much we love them. Do not delay anything that adds laughter and joy to your life.

Eid Mubarak to you all.

Sirajul Islam
Social sciences researcher
and consultant
Pisciculture Housing Society,
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Cricket and Mohakhali flyover

Nobody seems to understand the insult that is being heaped on us and the 'glorious animal'. Yes, I am talking about our chicken cricketers. If one had a little shame, one would have removed this tag long ago. Please remove this very underserving title of TIGERS from this cricket team for which we are destined to spend millions with no results.

But then we are also throwing billions to build mausoleums for our party chiefs. The day I have the reins of this country I promise you there will be a mausoleum on each of my family members' graves. Isn't that a great idea for a country where millions are still deprived of the basic needs of life?

As for the flyover, even a lay person could see that it will only multiply the traffic jam in the area. But the Barrister and his advisers couldn't see it. What an unfortunate nation we are. I think we should get rid of all the traffic engineers and consign them to Timbuktu to learn a bit of traffic engineering.

Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Deaths in Thailand

In Thailand at least 80 Muslims were killed by the police. They demonstrated against the arrest of their fellow activists. What was their fault? Why were they killed brutally? Is there anybody in this world who will make the Thai government responsible for this barbaric activities? Video footage shows that the demonstrators were kicked and dragged on to the police van. Was it not violation of human rights?

When the Iraqi people killed Bigli (British journalist) it was termed an act of terrorism and violation of human rights.

Why a separate rule for Thai-

land?
Taslim Hasan Sabu
Dept. Finance & Banking, University of Dhaka

Price hike

There is a hue and cry that people are suffering due to higher prices of the daily essentials for the past four months, instead of past four years and that is also being attributed mostly to the recent natural calamities like the floods, incessant rain and *monga* prevailing in the north-western region of our country. Being chiefly an import based economy, Bangladesh with India alone had 3 billion US dollars import trade. For the last four years, there have been continued effort by our major exporters to reduce trade imbalance with India, but the situation has not changed.

Under the above circumstances, the policy planners and decision makers of the government, in consultation with the World Bank (WB) & International Monetary Fund (IMF) can lessen the burden of the citizens by subsidising the daily essentials sold in the markets, or else increase the wages and salaries, professional fees and the percentage of business profit, much to the comfort of all sections of the society.

Golan Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

Set our man free

As the Eid nears, we all are busy getting prepared for the joyful event. Some of us will have a chance to go to village home and reunite with others which is hardly possible for our hectic work schedule. Unfortunately, one family will miss their near one and pass the Eid in anxiety thinking about his safety and wellbeing. There is no news about the abducted Bangladeshi truck driver Abul Kashem Faruk. We hope the Iraqi Resistance Forces

will understand that we have nothing to do with the illegal occupation and set our man free.

Saif
Dhaka

"The Power of Nightmares"

A three part TV documentary called

Muslim terrorists to further their colonial and racist agendas. This documentary examined how things are deliberately exaggerated to scare the British and American public and to harass Muslims, or anyone who dares to speak up. Many examples of arrests (based on anti-Muslim feelings and pure racism) by the US and British gov-

witness testified because the FBI offered to reduce his sentence if he testified! The Arab men were also accused of planning to attack US military base, fighters jets etc. in Turkey. And to support that claim they used a sketch on a piece of paper, found inside a day-planner which was found under the sofa. However, that sketch was actually

"Vulnerability of Muslims"

What strange thing Mr. Shahjahan has found in my letter (DS 01.11.04) about the DS editorial is also strange to me. I have deplored and condemned the deaths of 78 Thai people in no uncertain manner. My concern was the tone of the DS editorial. The death of 78 Thai people have been reported by almost all major newspapers of the world including Indian ones. But Mr. Shahjahan should know that there is a difference between news and editorial.

The trouble in southern Thailand's Muslim majority area bordering Malaysia is nothing new. The Muslim separatist movement in the area is a source of worry to the Thai govt. Time and again they had tried to control the movement with mild and minimum force. But of late the separatists have started killing, terrorising the minority Buddhists and Christians in the area. They have also started attacking police posts. This led to the heavy crackdown by local police with the help of the army. But under no circumstances the deaths of Muslim demonstrators could be justified.

I wonder, being a sensible person how Mr. Shahjahan is advocating "communalisation" of the issue. If we start looking at such issues as Muslim cause, Buddhist cause, Christian cause, Hindu cause, then we will be dividing this mother earth with serious repercussions.

MK Barua, On e-mail

'The Power of Nightmares' was aired by BBC2 recently. (Read responses from viewers on www.bbc.co.uk/nightmares or just go to BBC site and search for The Power of Nightmares) It is about the so-called War on Terror which is used by the neo-cons and the anti-

ernments were investigated in this documentary. In one example, four Arab men (alleged terrorist cell) are charged by the FBI based on the accounts of a witness who, it emerged later, himself is actually an international con man. More shocking was the fact that this

drawn by a mentally deranged man who used to live in that house and had committed suicide a year ago!

You think that's bad? Now think about the people who are being tortured simply because America 'thinks' those people are 'probably' planning to attack America. And

the beggars so innovative and daring. Some would pretend to be blind and some others would splash their forehead with dye to make them look horrifying. Often, some beggars hire malnourished children to draw sympathy.

The Ministry of Social Welfare

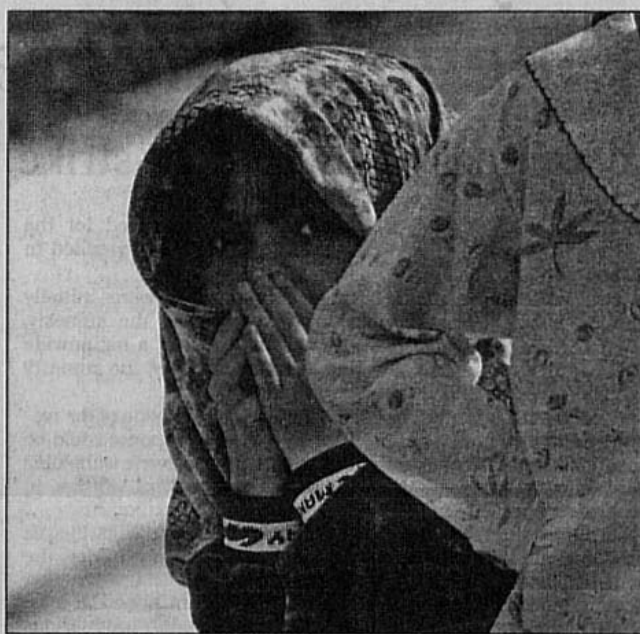


PHOTO: AFP

"What's the matter with America"

I would like to express my thanks to Zafar Sobhan for his write-up (December 5th) on the presidential election, and what it implies in terms of where the United States is going. He has explained this tragedy from a perspective that is not being heard from the main media groups here in the US. The media outlets here, in New York, have been analysing this election in terms of the campaign strategies of the two dominant political parties, and those strategies alone, and not in terms of what it says about the shift in American political and social culture. "The problem is not with the Democratic Party. The problem is with the American people." I do believe that what this election sheds light on is the more permanent (and far more negative) social effect of the 9-11 attacks, namely the regrouping and strengthening of the feared and fear-weaned Christian radical right wing of the political spectrum.

It should be seen as a highly unfortunate turn of events that what was once one of the world's most progressive nations should turn to become a bastion of intolerance, xenophobia and fundamentalism.

Omar Siddiquee
Utara, Dhaka

As someone living in the US for several years, I completely agree with Zafar Sobhan's article on the 2004 US elections and also want to add some of my own thoughts. Tom Frank's best-seller book, What's the Matter with Kansas, exemplifies a well known fact - the US electorate is

deeply fractured between two groups that couldn't be more different than each other. The first group, the 'East Coast elites' in Mr. Sobhan's article, comprises of people who mostly reside along the west coast and the upper north west section of the country. These sections of the country, which include the large metropolitan cities like New York, Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles and Washington, DC (Chicago being an exception), are home to America's best colleges and most prosperous communities. The city of Boston, for example, has more Ivy League colleges than all of the southern states combined. The liberal attitudes and entrepreneurial spirit of the people living in these regions (also known to many as the blue states), has been attracting additional talented people over the years, not only from the United States, but also from other parts of the world. With their superior educational and technical skill sets, these people fuelled and drove America's economic growth to stratospheric levels during President Clinton's second term.

On the other hand, the second group, which comprises of the rest of America's electorate, contributed and received very little from President Clinton's economic boom. Most of these people earn their livelihood in agricultural and manufacturing sectors, which are facing stiff competition from abroad. Unable to compete with their more educated liberal counterparts and foreigners for better jobs and opportunities and

fearful of changes taking place overseas, these people were also incensed at President Clinton's moral lapses, which east and west coast liberals were all too happy to overlook in exchange for economic prosperity, and his adherence to the world opinion. In George W. Bush, they found a candidate with diametrically opposed views to Clinton's. Thanks to the flaws inherent in any democratic process, this group has been blessed with a weapon - the power of a voting majority.

Nipun Rahman
US

I have read the rebuttals on Mr. Zaeid Ali's article with more interest than I have read the actual article with. I am amused by how much people reacted to an article whose writer's mental capacity has been compared to that of a "15 year old".

I will criticise the writer on writing an article that was ill in diplomacy and tactfulness, brinking on the point of being slanderous. Otherwise, the article highlights some important points and facts. It tries to point out that the Republicans place exaggerated importance to moral and ethical issues related to changing definitions of family and marriage and their detrimental effect on the social fabric. The point's credibility will be realised by readers who have read the replies to the article. Many replies even admitted that they preferred the reasons mentioned above over other issues such as international considerations, rising health costs and unemploy-

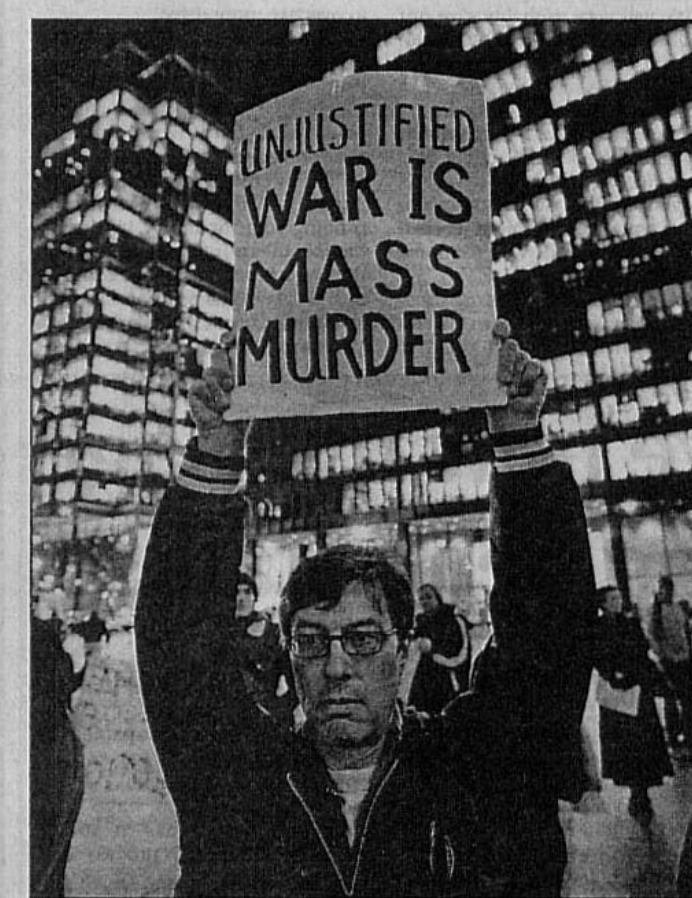


PHOTO: AFP

ment. Being of a conservative nature myself, I support President Bush on his policies on gay marriages and stem cell research. However, most people would agree with me that paying more attention to such issues is too much of a price to pay, as the very issue of global stability and peace is at stake under him.

Syed Quader
Cardiff University, Cardiff,
Wales, UK

"Ohio has failed the world" has

drawn wrath of many of your internet readers from the United States. I guess the opinion these readers have expressed make a lot of sense for those who voted for Bush. They did so in full knowledge of their leader and what he stood for and they are the American majority. Kerry lost because he based his campaign on an anti-Bush sentiment without providing any alternative to where he wanted to lead the US.

However, that is not the point

that the rest of the world has with Ohio. Ohio carried to power a US leader who does not understand the rest of the world; in fact he does not care for the rest of the world. What Americans who voted for Bush perhaps do not see is what the rest of the world sees; that Bush lied before the world on reasons for invading Iraq; that he has divided just not America but the world and he has driven the Islamic world into despair. A leader who backs the corrupt regimes in the Middle East and invades Islamic countries in the name of fighting terrorism and ends killing thousands of innocent Muslims will in no way be seen as harbinger of peace but as one inclined to start a new crusade against the Muslims.

Mr. Bush has been elected democratically and the world must accept it; what happened in Ohio notwithstanding. What Mr. Bush and America must now do is accept these same democratic rights as far as other nations and countries are concerned. If the Palestinians choose Arafat as their leader democratically, he must be given the same respect as Mr. Bush. Then, when Muslims are fundamentalists, they should be accorded the same respect as those 100 million evangelists who voted Mr. Bush to power, for there is no question that Christian fundamentalism had a big say for the Bush victory. Please practice what you preach and apply the same principles upon which you base your high moral standards upon those that you condemn. If you adopt one principle for all, a lot of our

problem with you and your neo-con administration would vanish into thin air and we would have no qualms with which way the people of Ohio voted.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

I read Zaeid Ali's letter regarding our recent national election. And he's right - we are stupid. But the focus on the state of Ohio is a revealing irony. A place literally and figuratively mid-America. Average that is. And Zaeid's criticism is just as average. To the bush Republicans he is a joke who curses the US from the bosom of mid-America. They will say he is taking advantage of the benefits here while he backbites us in Bangladesh. They have no regard for people of differing opinions, and his point of view does nothing but paint him in the same stereotype which they represent but at a polar opposite. We are all stupid. Do we allow Bush (and his handlers) to manipulate us into becoming the very thing for which we find fault in them? He will foment more violence, will manipulate a scenario that calls for more military intervention. He is aided in doing so by simulating blaming Ohio. How will the residents of Ohio (as they typify our entire nation) respond when asked who they will follow? The one who calls them stupid, or the one who says 'kill those who view you as stupid (read 'evildoers')'. Love one another.

Peter Hoodees
One-mail

I'm writing in reply to the purely

democratic and open-minded opinions that have been published in November 8, 2004 -- many of them wanted to teach the "college kid" a lesson by expressing their opinions. Except the first two replies (Paula Bernistein, Thousand Oaks, California, USA and JDH on e-mail), the other three replies by B Pogson, Bruce Irle and Esparza Robert all had one implicit message in common. The dominant and violent tone of their writing could be depicted by a situation where the sadistic husband reminds his thin and calm wife that she's supposed to 'obey' his orders.

Mr Bruce Irle wrote "...businesses in our great nation need all the breaks they can get so they can flourish..." - which was just another proof that macro-economic problems inside a geographical region could be of paramount importance to the problems faced by female Iraqi prison inmates, Vietnamese casualties of war -- victims of minuscule Christian accidents.

Mr Esparza Robert stated that it was essential for us to have "national pride". Achieving greater security by sacrificing the rights of the Muslim and Asian minorities to not to be harassed because of what they are (though a thoughtfully implemented strategy would stick to the principles of true America and respect its melting pot) and convincing conservatives of their narrow-minded beliefs are much more important than world peace and freedom.

Nayeem Arefin
One-mail