

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.



Hijab issue

Mona Eltahawy, a New York based columnist, wrote an article in the international page of DS on March 8 regarding the current issue of Muslim women garments. The title was "Will a Muslim woman ever be more than what she wears?" The article endeavored to examine the case of Sabina. The civil division of the court of appeal ruled that Sabina's school unlawfully excluded her, denied her right to mainfest & practise her religion. No doubt the verdict was a welcome one. As Bengali Muslims our joys multiplied over Sabina's triumph. Nevertheless, Mona expressed her resentment over the verdict. At the end of her article she confessed, "I wore the hijab for nine years from the age of 16 to 25 and don't feel my identity lies

in a piece of cloth." I just wonder, Mona, why you started at 16? If you had started at pre-puberty age and discarded later, one could easily perceive that it had been imposed upon and finally it took nine long years for you to realise that it's nothing more than a piece of cloth! We know that the first injunction revealed in the Quran was 'ikra' means read and not worship. One really cannot stabilise in worship unless faith is internalised properly. If you really felt aversion to hijab then why did you start at 16 when a girl is free and mature enough to reason for her action?

You said that to this day Muslim scholars issue various interpretations about Muslim dress. That is

true but one must not seek easy, weak interpretations that suit his or her whims and desires. Moreover, all scholars are not reliable & authentic. So, it is imperative for all of us to know and learn from authentic scholars.

You also mentioned that some Muslim scholars in America even told Muslim women that they didn't have to wear head scarf if they felt in danger from anti-Muslim attacks. That cannot be sound logic!

Recently, I came to learn a few stories of non-Muslim women practising veil because they feel dignified and secure with it. So, you see the wide spectrum of perception ranges from a piece of cloth to a badge of honour!

Shamim Rezwana, Dhaka

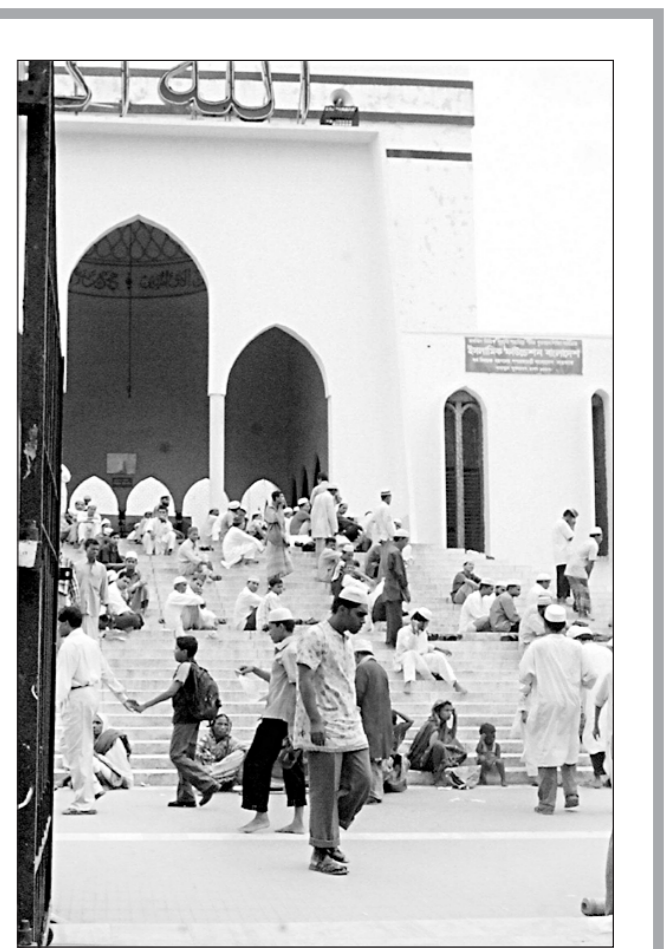


PHOTO: AFP

Weekly holiday and Friday

Friday is a blessed day for Muslims. Among the many extraordinary things that happened on this day, Allah created the father of mankind, Adam on Friday. Adam was also forgiven on this day for eating from the forbidden tree. It is our weekly Eid or day of celebration. Moreover, Friday is not just about attending the Juma prayer; within this day there are certain times when Allah readily answers our prayers.

After a week of hard work, people certainly do need a two-day holiday to completely rejuvenate and become productive again. That's why western nations enjoy two days, Saturday and Sunday, as their weekly holidays. These days have been selected considering the religious needs of the majority of their citizens.

Interestingly, nowadays our business class is actively lobbying to maintain the one day weekly holiday, but they want to change this day from Friday to Sunday. They are writing letters to DS (e.g. March 5 and 8, 2005) to influence the government's decision on this holiday issue.

We don't know what would have been the verdict of Allah if this kind of dilemma of choosing the weekly holiday took place during our Prophet's time. But we know about Allah's displeasure when some of the new Muslims left the Juma sermon when a Syrian trading caravan arrived in Medina, from the following verses of sura Al-Jumuah, "O you who believe, when the call is proclaimed for prayer on the day of Jumuah (Friday), hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew."

Therefore, there is little doubt that Friday has more right to be the weekly holiday than any other day. Shukla Mirza, Doha, Qatar

Speculations on prices

TV reporters seem to project market prices just after monitoring the kitchen market of Friday morning only. On the weekly holiday demands rise for obvious reasons. So it is not the market to be projected to the public. From such reflections people get wrong signals. Buyers get panicked and buy out items they require for future. An artificial demand is created, thus traders raise prices further and a chain reaction takes place. Moreover, TV reporters are no professional market analysts, yet they speculate only on one criterion or so.

press freedom mean in a society like ours? How can we expect unbiased, impartial news when the owners of some newspapers are directly or indirectly involved with party politics?

The issue deserves close attention.

Md. Harisur Rahman
Dept of Anthropology
Jahangirnagar University

National math camp

Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad Committee is going to organise the first ever National math camp to select the six contestants for the upcoming International Mathematical Olympiad to be held in Mexico, July 11-19.

Khulshi, Chittagong

Health promotion organisation

Some days ago I attended a programme organised by Breast Feeding Foundation in RMCH. Our respected teachers talked about different aspects of breast-feeding. Being a doctor I found much of the information was unknown to me.

My today's writing is not about breast-feeding but about some general health problems that we can mitigate through simple awareness. An organisation may carry a very important role in this regard. In my observation this kind of organisation will be very helpful for students as

blood donation, emergency management etc may be its agenda.

To build a healthy nation its people have to be imparted adequate health knowledge. Ziaul Huque
Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Rajshahi

Patience

From time immemorial patience has always been a virtue. Courage and confidence being the other cherished ones. Patience or 'Sabr' solved lots of problems, showed ways and means for solutions and pacified people.

In these days of tense and stressful life we need patience. We get

around. One morning the driver was washing the car with a foaming shampoo, which was slippery. I found my dog running from a distance towards the slippery water, and then sliding along the foam on to a closed gate. She would then get up, walk back, take a run and slide on the foam. Until, when she stumbled and fell and sprained her leg. She came screaming and limping to me, and that was the end of the game. I was gaping at the event. Can a dog have the intelligence to play tobogganing or sliding and do it over and over again? Does any other reader have any stories of dog intelligence or unusual dog behaviour? Can we start a thread which is not all gloomy? Unfortunately, I cannot

Saifur's comment on human rights

I am astonished to read the report, in your issue of March 17th, that Finance Minister Saifur Rahman resents that "donors and the press consider the deaths in 'crossfire and encounters' as human rights violations". "Only killers are taken to encounters", he insists. Apparently Mr. Saifur Rahman believes that the accused killers, even though not convicted in a court of law, are not entitled to human rights, and that their deaths are not the result of human rights violations. He seems to be confirming that these so-called "crossfire" deaths are deliberate, and then attempting to justify them. Two wrongs, in his view, make a right.

I wonder if Mr. Saifur Rahman recalls that the convicted killers of Bangabandhu, many of whom have been sentenced to death in a court of law, are still languishing in prison, being accorded their full recourse to the Law and the appeals process. No "crossfire" or "encounter" has befallen these gentlemen, although, in Mr. Rahman's view, they should not be entitled to any human rights.

There seems to be a serious inconsistency in Mr. Saifur Rahman's views.

Syed Hamde Ali
The Nawab Palace
Bogra

Death of Abdul Latif

With the death of Abdul Latif the country has lost a leading music composer, folk singer, and lyricist. Abdul Latif was linked with the Language Movement of 1952 through his popular song "Amar bhaiyer rakete rangano" of which he was the first composer, "Ora amar mukher kotha kaira nitey chaay," and "Daam diye kinechhi Bangla" etc. He got the recognition of a "Bhasa Sainik."

Abdul Latif participated in the liberation war in 1971. His songs inspired the freedom loving people of Bangladesh. He got many awards and recognition for his contribution in the fields of music and culture and the liberation war.

The Bangladeshis at home and abroad want to know more about this great personality. The Daily Star may please consider bringing out a special supplement or a special issue of the week-end magazine dedicated to the life, struggle and achievements of Abdul Latif.

Abib Reza
Paribagh, Dhaka-1000

Beautification of Ramna Park

It appears that Dhaka city is undergoing a process of beautification by banks, financial institutions, govt. agencies and other private organisations as per directives of the government. The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is acting as the chief supervising body for the beautification project according to the directives of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). We have also observed that Ramna Park has been taken under the beautification programme like other important

Violation of Geneva Convention

This is in response to the concern of a number of leading international health experts for the dead Iraqis as reported recently both in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and in your newspaper (12 March 2005). In gross violation of Geneva Convention, the Anglo-US occupation forces have not bothered to maintain any records of the dead Iraqis. This illegal war, carried out under the pretext of lies, was aimed at the colonial occupation of Iraq through a stage-managed election to empower some yes-men who will pretend to rule while the Anglo-US coalition forces continue to run Iraq and plunder its oil. The Iraqi occupation constituted a revival of the colonial policies that the British government had practised for centuries while maintaining a sham democratic government at home. Like Professor McPherson of Oxford University who criticised the British government's policy on this issue (BMJ, 12 March 2005), there were conscientious academicians in the past who had also exposed the British government's barbarism perpetuated under the colonial rule that

prevailed for centuries all over the world. One such person was historian F.B. Bradley Birt who had produced a graphic account in his book "The Romance of an Eastern Capital [History of Dhaka (now in Bangladesh)] in 1906 about the colonial brutality that the British government had inflicted upon the freedom fighters of 1857. They were not only killed, but their corpses were kept hanging from trees so that vultures could feed on them. The stench of those dead bodies had made the life of the surviving inhabitants of Dhaka intolerable. No records had been maintained to account for the several millions that the British colonial rulers had slaughtered in order to maintain the colonial empire where the sun never used to set.

The present British labour government is just following the old despised path of colonialism with total contempt and disregard for international laws and therefore is not at all interested in maintaining any records of the dead Iraqis.

Rafiq Ahmed
On e-mail



PHOTO: AFP

Unfortunately, government agencies hardly monitor such price-hikes. Hope some one will do the needful to project the real market situation.

AR Choudhury

Uttara, Dhaka

International news

Please give the international community living in Bangladesh more international news and reflections.

It will make your paper more attractive to all. Willy Legendre
Baharchara, Cox's Bazar

BNP and hartal

Why are the BNP leaders and supporters talking against hartal?

Have they forgotten that Khaleda Zia called hartal on 380 days during the Awami rule?

Zubair
Toronto, Canada

Paharika Express

Paharika Express, an inter-city train from Chittagong to Sylhet, is always late and never on time. The food service of the train is very bad. The attendants and guards are corrupt. They even sell tickets already bought by others. Hawkers and beggars are in abundance in the train. They make the journey disgusting with their shout and cry. This train has a tendency to stop not only at the stations but also in many places where it is not supposed to stop. During Eid holidays, it becomes a chaotic train without any rules or restrictions.

I'd like to grab the attention of the railway authorities to provide a new train like "Suborno Express" or improve the condition of Paharika Express. It's an important train for Chittagong and Sylhet passengers. So please think of us.

Rahnuma Hadi
On e-mail

Freedom of press

Around the world freedom of press, a cornerstone of democracy, is under attack. In our society tolerance to different opinions has diminished over the last few years.

We know that through the press our voice can be heard and the truth will come out. But what does real

well as for the general people of our country.

In our daily lives we face various health hazards like simple cold, cough, fever. Again some incidents like drowning, choking, road accidents, simple cut injuries or bleeding, snake bite, poisoning may need very immediate management.

I came to know that in DMCH an organisation arranges a programme to provide knowledge for saving life in emergency situations. But they charge fees.

Some of our renowned personalities have taken up various awareness programmes on different issues like dengue, AIDS etc, but these have very limited opportunities for mass participation. We can serve this purpose easily by developing a student based health organisation. Our young students are very much energetic and courageous. They are running SANDHANI, ADHUNIK, BANDHAN & so many organisations independently.

It may act as a primary health knowledge providing organisation. AIDS prevention, dengue, first aid, breast cancer, disaster management, vaccination programmes, prevention of environment pollution,

bogged down in traffic jam, sweat in the high noon, hear blaring horns, confront unruly rickshaws, buses and trucks, get obstructed by traffic police/sergeant, are forced to listen to useless, pointless speeches of lot many politicians and power brokers, get stuck in 'hartals', witness brutal mindless political and non-political killings etc. All these occasions build up stress. Yet, to save ourselves from annihilation we require sound reasoning so that we do not harm family friends, community and ourselves.

As impatience is synonymous with destruction, all of us need to exercise patience. And at the same time look for options and solutions.

We, Bangladeshis, a volatile nation of 140 million people, need to exercise patience ever more in all levels and all fields.

SNM, Dhaka

A different story

Your letters page is usually full of gloomy subjects, all about problems and problems. But life is not all like that. There are brighter stories which just need to be told. Here is one. I have a small puppy, only five months old. She loves running

make my dog do it again. She is limping on three legs, and most likely after she gets better, she may not want to try the game again.

A Hasanat Khan
Uttara

Hartal on Easter Sunday

I am surprised that the Awami League has scheduled its next hartal for one of Christianity's most holy day, Easter Sunday (March 27). I am a foreigner, married to a Bangladeshi, and live in Dhaka. I am also a Christian. Living here, I have experienced quite a number of hartals, and have noticed that the opposition has in the past taken into account the sensitivities of other groups, such as SSC exams takers, when scheduling a hartal.

Perhaps the Awami League is unaware of the significance of this day in the Christian calendar, due to the small number of Christians in the country. However, I wonder whether the Awami League, now that it is aware, would consider shifting this hartal out of compassion for its Christian constituency.

J. Ohlmacher
Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Wealth from waste

A news item from BD News (18 March) has attracted my attention. I would request the print media to create awareness for everyone, more so for our government to this resource potential from traditional waste, which can produce useful wealth for the nation.

It is praiseworthy to note that Waste Concern has taken it up as a commercial venture and are trying their best to coordinate activities in this direction. Given government support and sympathy to this worth while cause, it can bring us useful products as well as provide much needed employment to large number of needy people particularly in urban areas in Bangladesh.

Municipal refuse can be a very profitable source of bio-fertilizer and power. Also to some extent refuse and sewage both in urban and rural areas provide useable gas as fuel. These are areas, which need national interest and attention in a country short of fuel sources.

Newspapers as opinion builders have a positive role to play in this respect, and act as a catalyst for this important national issue.

S. A. Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka

places of the city. It is a fact that so many beautiful things are being spoiled due to lack of proper maintenance.

Parks are a beautiful place. But they cannot remain so if meetings and all sorts of gatherings are allowed there. The planners should address the issue.

Ali Ahmed Dewan
Dutch BanglaBank Limited
Dhaka

Harassment by police

When you have started for North Bengal of Khulna or Chittagong or anywhere inside Dhaka or outside Dhaka with your family or alone, and are on the way, a policeman in uniform may signal and stop your car.

Then he shows you a paper indicating that your vehicle committed something wrong a few days or a few months before and that for that wrong done your vehicle will immediately be taken over by him to the police station and you may then go to the court and settle the matter. As he insists on seizing your vehicle, you have no other way but to surrender to him and want to settle the matter on the spot. He will take something between Tk 1,500 to 2,000 or so and give you a receipt, not of course of the money taken by him but some sort of a receipt, which means nothing. Then he will ask you to meet him at his duty place and give you another receipt that the matter has been settled. Here also there is no mention of the money taken.

Such things have been happening to us, to our relations, friends and many others. But thinking that no complaint will produce any result, rather it will invite more harassment for the complainant, people prefer to remain silent.

This is creating discontent not only against the police but against the government also. We feel that the higher officials of the police and the Honorable Home Minister are not aware of this. Can you do something about this harassment?

Our suggestion -- if a vehicle commits some wrong it must be taken care of on the spot and fined on the spot to be paid at once or within some date without seizing the vehicle or the vehicle papers should be seized without seizing the vehicle and the case should be referred to the court.

Keramat Ali, Wari, Dhaka

Smoking in public

A BSS report said that a man was fined for smoking in public place at Patarhat in Mehendiganj upazila of the Barisal district on March 18. This is the first reported occurrence of police fining for public smoking after Bangladesh passed a law banning smoking in the public.

It's welcome news that the Bangladesh government has banned smoking in public places, in line with a United Nations treaty on tobacco control. The parliament had passed a law implementing the ban, setting a fine of 50 taka for people caught smoking in places such as schools, offices, libraries, hospitals and airports.

But how Azizur Rahman, who was fined for smoking in a public place, is supposed to know that parliament has passed a law on smoking? Has the government devised any mechanism for letting the people know about the law it passed? You could always say that the news of passing the law was widely publicised by the media. But unfortunately the policymakers did not think that Azizur Rahman, living in a remote village in Barisal, might not have any access to any TV or radio. No matter how much black bile is spewed by the government party lawmakers against the newspapers, they are the ones who actually tried to publicise the news.

If the government lawmakers think that Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar had done the most, they are wrong; very wrong. Because viewers and listeners hardly understand the language of BT and Betar. BT and Betar broadcast the most incomprehensible language on their transmissions.

Moreover, is the process of passing the law complete? Have all the guidelines been made clear to the law enforcing agencies so that they can enforce the law correctly?

If you are passing a law on anything, please enforce it in a legally correct way.

Ekram Kabir
Gulshan, Dhaka