

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.

**Donald standards!**

Donald Rumsfeld, in a recent speech in Singapore, lectured China about its military spendings. To further illuminate us, he pointed out, "Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and expanding arms purchases?" Yes, we all wonder why a country, especially when it is not threatened by anyone, spends billions on arms when that money should be spent on the welfare of its citizens. And that brings us right back to Donald Rumsfeld's civilised and peace-loving America.

No other military on earth can match America's military power. America has thousands of nuclear warheads. Clearly that doesn't seem to be enough, so now America is developing mini-nukes, even though no other country has any mini-nuke. America has repeatedly used chemical and biological weapons to kill Muslims, even though these weapons are banned and no other country is using them against America. And to add insult to injury, no other nation has any weapons in space, but America is developing 'space-based interceptors', capable of destroying enemy satellites in space, destroy missiles, or even hit enemy targets on the ground. Maybe Mr. Rumsfeld can tell us why America is putting weapons in space when no other country is doing it. But, of course, we all know way Mr. Rumsfeld is lecturing China. He thinks his country has the right to do anything and everything, but other countries need to get permission from Washington before doing anything!

I would like to point out to Mr. Rumsfeld that there are known weapons, for which there are known budgets; and there are unknown weapons, for which there are unknown budgets. And since many of the top-secret US weapons programmes are unknown, we can only conclude that the US has an unknown military budget. A country like the US, with unknown military budget creates unknown amount of concerns for an unknown number of countries. So it is only natural that these nervous folks will spend an unknown amount of money to counter the unknown threats coming from the unknown strength of the US military. Sadly, this takes the whole military spending issue to a totally unknown level. And that, we know, is a very dangerous sce-

nario!! You got that, Mr. Rumsfeld?

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham, UK

**Tareq Zia's US trip**

It is with utmost embarrassment that we saw Mr. Tareq Zia's recent trip to the United States as an unofficial representative of the Bangladesh government.

During his trip, he met with high officials from FBI, Pentagon, US Chamber of Commerce etc. So far, it is unheard of for someone who is not an official representative to act in such way in a foreign country.

Bangladesh has been given many names in the international community. We, the citizens, are gradually losing our ability even to get surprised any more at all by the new "tags" that are being assigned to Bangladesh now. Apparently, the diplomatic tags are yet to come.

How sad and frustrated do the people of a country have to be for the government to take notice?

**Potheek Aami**  
Edinboro, PA, US

**Agartala Conspiracy Case**

I have been living in Toronto, Canada since 1981. I read the on-line version of your newspaper to keep up to date with the news of Bangladesh on a regular basis.

As you know yesterday was the historic June 19. It was on this day in 1968 when the trial for Agartala Conspiracy Case began. To commemorate this day, I, on behalf of the 13 survivors out of the 35 accused, would like to convey some thoughts and reminisce about the case and what it has meant for all of us. I am currently in the process of finishing a piece reflecting on the case and its ramifications. The sole purpose of this piece would be to remind our current generations of the importance of this case and the stepping stone that it was towards our liberation as an independent nation just a few years and many struggles later.

**Mahfuzul Bari**  
Toronto, Canada

**A nice ad**

This is in response to the letter of Rafiqul Islam Rime published in The Daily Star on 21 May. In his letter the writer has criticised the recent Flexi Load advertisement of Grameen Phone which in now being telecast

on all private channels. He has written that the whole advertisement was built on a vulgar concept and that the ad was a

farical one!! I had the privilege of meeting with the actors of this ad Marjuk Russel and Hasan Masood at Nandan Park a couple of weeks ago. I was astonished to see that a large number of viewers were taking photos with them and they congratulated them for performing brilliantly in this ad.

But it is making no sense to me how anyone could describe such a nice and entertaining ad as a vulgar, farical one!

**Nazmus Saquib**  
Notre Dame College  
Dhaka

**Save the teens**

Teenagers today are growing up in a dangerous environment. I am a student of an eminent English medium school and witnessing this destruction taking place first hand. In TV, our own channels provide little entertainment for adolescents so we turn to foreign channels where scenes of kissing and other immoral acts are only normal. Today most teens are more attracted to 'Indian Idol' and 'Hot and Wild' than to 'Medhabi', 'Horlicks Genius Bangladesh' or 'India's Child Genius'. In my classroom alone, indecent behaviour by some students during the break is not uncommon but a daily affair. This is extremely sad, as such behaviour is not a part of our culture or religion. Can anyone save the teens from such moral degradation?

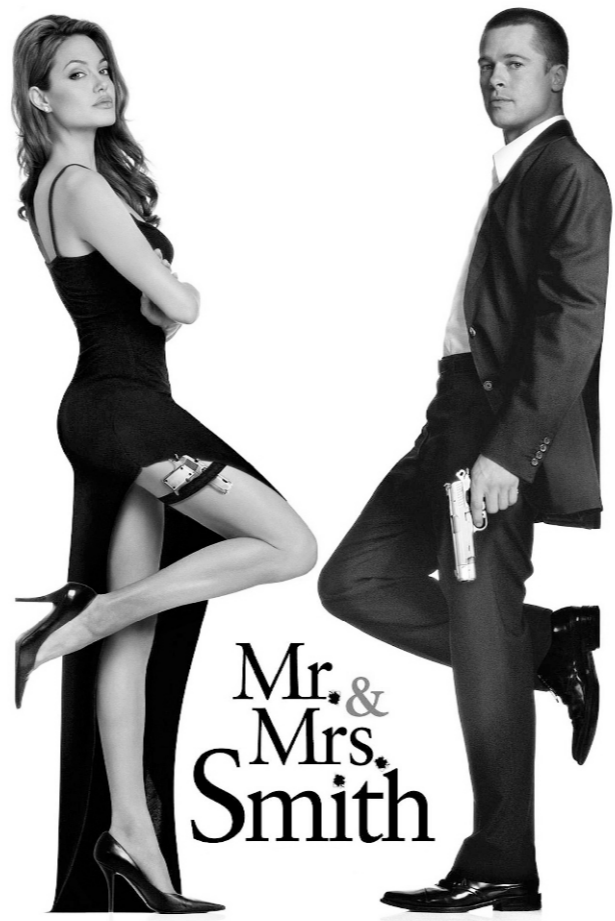
**A worried teenager**  
On e-mail

**Concerned persons**

It is a pity that only the affected and aggrieved citizens of our beloved country complain, speak and write about the menace of corruption in Bangladesh. The whole episode would be better addressed if all the former and present ministers of finance and the secretaries ministry of finance of the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh sat together in the conference room of the cabinet division and sought ways and means to address this burning issue.

**Golam Ashraf**  
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka-1206

**CINEPLEX disappointment**



Star Cineplex, the first multiplex cinema theatre in our country has thoroughly disappointed us. Promising to show the latest Hollywood blockbusters, it has continued to show old Hollywood classics, which were released 2 or 3 years ago. This means we cannot see movies like Batman Begins and Mr. and Mrs. Smith like in other countries where these are released in cinema halls soon after their world premiere. So what good is having a multiplex when you can't see latest Hollywood blockbusters?

**Nayem Islam, The Aga Khan School, Uttara, Dhaka**

**Saltwater irrigation**

Irrigation by application of sweet waters is commonly understood. Saline waters are also used in production of solar salts and cultivation of irrigated shrimps. Salt production by solar evaporation (*the other being the rock salts*) is one of the most ancient industries in the world. The world salt production is estimated at 181.5 million tons per year while that of Asia is said to be 36.5 million tons. Bangladesh produces between 1 and 1.5 million tons of solar salts a year varying with the coastal weather and other influencing factors. Similarly, the world shrimp production is estimated at 500,000 tons, of which approximately one-third is the irrigated shrimps. Asia contributes 80 percent of the world total. Bangladesh produces only 25,000 tons per year, which is only 10 percent of that produced by Thailand. Saltwater irrigation is the key input in production of both the solar salts and irrigated shrimps. In most developing countries including Bangladesh, solar salts and irrigated shrimps are produced along the coastline. The small salt farms and shrimp fields are scattered along the coast and resist coming under any regulatory provisions of the government. Very often, precise figures regarding its location, extent of holdings and production statistics are not available and even if it is, it remain debatable because the data referred to, in most cases, has either been manipulated or documented to be skimpy. Salt farming in the Gangetic delta is probably the beginning of coastal engineering germinated from within the social sciences. The ancient community known as *malongis* in *Chandrwip*, the present *Bakerganj-Patuakhali*, in the south-western coast of Bangladesh started farming salts by dam-retaining the sea waters at astronomical high tides and then naturally drying by solar heat within the terraced compartments steeped by mud. The wide spread grids of these in series kicked-off the sedimentation processes, eventually triggering the land reclamation engineering. The science that further shared the concomitant development of the nation's coast was raising the lands for secured homesteads and digging the trenches for domestic consumption of sweet water. The human habitation thus gradually surged up the coast resulting in cutting of the natural mangrove for increased settlement. Over time, salt farms continued to be pushed seaward by rice cultivation reversing the direction of habitation settlements towards the coastal potentials. The abundance of upland freshwater flow combined with local run-off in a favourable condition of adequate natural drainage accelerated this process. Shrimp cultivation on the other hand is not as old as salt farming but not a new phenomenon either, in the south-western coast of Bangladesh. Farmers used to construct shallow, seasonal enclosures on the banks of rivers and canals to grow shrimp as an extra source of income. The dynamic version of the modern embanking along the inter-tidal ribbon is the living geometry of the mudflat arising out of these human activities in the coastal regions of Bangladesh.

**Md. Saeedur Rahman, A retired Chief Engineer of BWDB**



**Hartal and a few alternatives**

In general term 'hartal' means suspension of work and business for political protest. The call for Hartal worked well during the British colonial period and later in the pre-independence days to mobilise public support through non-cooperation. However, in those days the call for hartal generally cut across party lines and was based mostly on patriotic grounds. Hartal gained popularity as it gave a sense of unity for a good cause against a common foe. To the general mass hartal appealed as a tool to fight against exploitation, vent frustration, project legitimate grievances and demand lawful rights. Post independence period was marked by change, both in the political arena and players, with disappearance of many of the past ideologies and conditions. Accordingly, the spirit of hartal underwent a few convulsions and later its power was conveniently redirected and unleashed in the cauldron of power struggle. Inevitably in the midst of the democratic reforms it became a formidable tool, especially to be used by the opposition to snatch power from the government before their term was over. There seems to be a feeling among most politicians and some quarters of the public to detach them from the notion of hartal as the ultimate weapon. Over the years the true spirit of hartal has regressed and degenerated to pander to the whims and interest of the political system. Parties in opposition to protest against the ruling regime especially use it in a hostile and destructive manner. Peaceful and non-violent way of settling political differences seems to be unattractive. This is in sharp contrast to the practice followed by most democratic countries of the world, where a fair and functional judicial system usually addresses such disagreements. Constitution and the due process of the law should be utilised to solve problems whether political or criminal. Evidently in the absence of an independent judicial system the ruling government is squarely blamed for most problems since very little option is available to the opponents. Today

political parties use hartal and its affiliates as a show of public support. And the yardstick of that recognition is usually measured in the size of the destruction and pain it can inflict on already beleaguered public. Ironically the general mass is held hostage to witness the unrest and those calling hartals expect that votes will come their way in the next election. This idea is self-defeating since people normally would like to elect their representative to protect them from such abuse and disruption of their daily life. In the name of hartal, a section of people is handed over the right to damage public and government properties without impunity. Mysteriously the rule of law comes to a stand still and sadly the authorities seem to accept that as a norm. What is done in the name of people is unlawful, undemocratic and is a form of terrorism. After decades of misuse of this previously potent political tool, time has come to challenge its legality. It is the basic right of every citizen to work and make a living whether hartal or not. A taxi or a bus driver may be the only wage earner in his family and harming him or her gives the nation a black eye. It is the utmost duty of all the branches of the government, especially those in the law enforcement agency, to ensure that the rights of the people are upheld. Lawmakers must redefine hartal and should not let the status quo to continue any more. May be it is time to rename parliament boycotting by it's member as hartal since during those periods peoples hopes and aspirations are not represented in the sacred house. We preach what is good for the nation but hardly practice it. We say what we should do but actually do less of it. Hartal is not written in indelible ink in our social book and therefore it must be eliminated; for how long will the public have to wait for the cycle to end?

**Md. Khairul Islam**  
Gulshan-2, Dhaka 1212

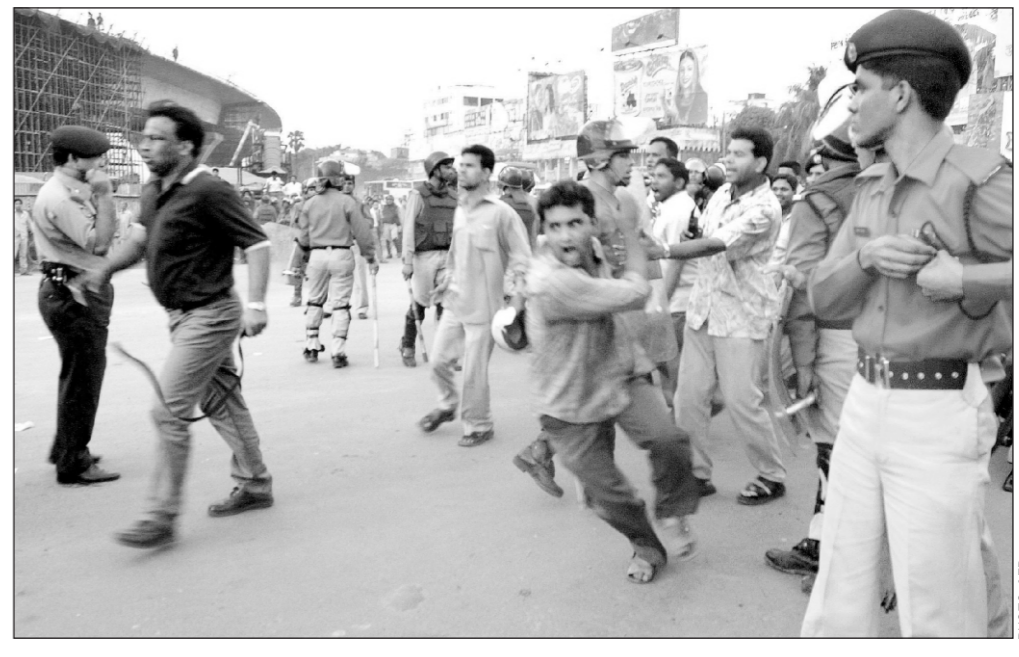


PHOTO: AFP

**Rotten fish and dirty plates!**

Thank you very much for your well-timed and investigative article. If it at least alerts the consumers and hotel goers it would have rendered a great service. The government will not act and prove their accountability since they think they have many important jobs to do. I just want to highlight one point taking advantage of your report. There are only 18 sanitary inspectors for 5000 restaurants in Dhaka, good enough! Let these 18 inspectors check and inspect only 18 restaurants a day and penalise the defaulters if any. You can be rest assured the remainders will be cautious and many will refrain from such nefarious act. Have you investigated how many restaurants the sanitary inspectors inspected in a particular period of time and how many were booked? Shortage of manpower is a common excuse. We want to see the officials working as per their normal character and with only average efficiency to fulfil their obligation towards the society.

**M. Azizur Rahman**  
On e-mail

**Race in 21st Century America**

The 4th national conference on, "Race in the 21st Century America," took place at Michigan State University, East Lansing, from April 6 to 8, 2005. Like the previous conferences, this was a great learning experience about culture, race and political issues. On February 2, 2005 Dr. Julieanne Malveaux organised a conference, "Does Race matter in the 21st Century?" Since the eighteenth century, America has struggled to develop ideas and policies that build unity, peace and communication in a society consisting of different cultures. Although America is a developed country and technologically advanced, we can still see homeless people, poverty, hundreds of people who are alcoholics; and there is inequality. Dean Frank Wu of Wayne State University, said that there are so many different races in America and due to racial integration, by the year 2050 people will be of mixed descent and races will no longer exist. In the year 2005 according to Dr. Malveaux, the percentage of the Blacks in the areas of housing, educational achievements, careers

and all areas of living was far lower than that of the Whites. Poverty, class distinction and racism are a part of everyday life in America. If we study the history of America, we see that Africans were brought to America as slaves for the cotton fields; segregation of neighbourhoods schools and even buses were features of American society. Racism, racial name-calling and segregation led to a civil rights movement. Hispanics and Chinese people were also brought to America to work in the fields and factories. On April 8, 2005, Professor Manning Marable, a reputed educationist, spoke at the conference. Hundreds of people attended his lecture, including High School students. We also met a group of Bahais. In his two-hour talk Manning Marable touched on the issue of class and race. He said that the legal system and even some judges practice racism against Blacks. Most of the people in jails are Blacks. Most of them were arrested during elections so that they cannot vote. Women were treated as inferiors and stereotypical for many centuries. The shocking fact is that women are still receiving wages of seventy-five cents by the hour, according to Dr. Kelly Morrison, of the department Journalism, Michigan State University. The female professors and scholars were being paid less than the male colleagues were in the department of Journalism at the university, for which she left the department. Manning Marable had presented many ideas and issues including the unjust justice system and unfair judges. We found that the most important facts that he mentioned are: America experiences mass incarceration, mass unemployment and mass disenfranchisement. America practices prejudice and negative presentations of other peoples and cultures in the print media, educational institutions and in TV. He said that there is racism and prejudice because of the people who practice it and because of the people who remain fearful, silent, and apathetic. He concluded that with courage and conviction we could bring equality and peace and overcome racism, prejudice and the fear of being different. We would like to say more, but for lack of space. We would like to mention that during our travels to China, Japan, India and Bangladesh we also observed extreme class bias and discrimination against women. We must all

celebrate humanism, stop violence against children, as violence begins at home, stop war and prejudice and build a better world. We are the leaders of peace and hope and we must continue to fight for freedom and true justice. We must continue to be the true champions of the freedom fighting spirit.  
**M. Shahi,**  
Estelle Mahmuma, Suchitra, Gabrielle

**Quality of bread and confectioneries**

It is interesting to go through your probing reports about food quality, particularly fruits, sweets and cooked restaurant foods that are available in our metropolis. Today (June 15) you have noted some response from the authorities who usually, like the three wise men, "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil". Now at least they have heard, seen and acted upon the evil of food adulteration, which is only the tip of the iceberg. May be in the days to come you may talk about the bakeries, not the very small ones, but the better named ones; like the local brands that do not mention the shelf-life of their bread on their package. Even some much-touted bakeries, said to have been set up with foreign collaboration, have ignored the appeal of their retailers and even a direct customer like me. They persistently ignore putting the expiry date on their bread packs!

In contrast some, like one foreign bakery set up in Banani, have stickers giving expiry dates of all their confectionery products. I have heard that as soon as this date is crossed, they donate the items to the poor and needy. I believe they are probably the only organisation that I know of in this trade who care about the freshness and quality of their products. All the others except for one or two local bakeries do not care about selling stale bread, biscuits and confectionery products to the gullible buyers, who are unknowingly attracted by their name and smart packaging. Will the authorities kindly look into this method of selling unhygienic product in the city, by the so-called better known bakeries?  
**S. A. Mansoor**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

**What a win !**



PHOTO: AFP

Can you believe it? Bangladesh have won against mighty Australia. When Bangladesh wins any memorable match I cannot help but write to the DS to express my emotions. What a magnificent win for Bangladesh against the world champion at Sofia Garden in Cardiff by 5 wickets! It is the win against rest of the world, it is the victory against those who criticise our cricket, and it is the triumph against the media that insists to take away our test status. Finally it is the success for cricket crazy lovers. Ashrafu's tremendous century helped him to come to the limelight again, Aftab's swashbuckling innings brought huge pleasure to the crowd. Let the win be continuous.

**Muhammad Bin Abdullah**  
Cox's Bazar  
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A leading Indian sports magazine, The Sportstar, dated June 4, 2005 published a regular column of Prominent English cricket writer Ted Corbett. In this issue he says, "these tigers are tame" referring to the Bangladesh cricket team. But at last Bangladesh have proved the critics wrong and showed that cricket is a glorious game of uncertainty. The win over the invincible Aussies is an answer to the English media. It's a slap to those who said Bangladesh had no right to play test cricket.

Two days after the match it still seems to me a dream. Could anyone ever see Bangladesh scored 200 for only 3?

It was Ashrafu who arguably single-handedly won the match for Bangladesh. An effervescent teenager produced the most exciting ODI innings for his country. I first saw him play cricket in January of 2001 at Bangabandhu Cricket stadium, in a match between Dhaka Metro and Chittagong Division in which he scored a century and took 7 wickets in an innings. Since then I have been a fan of his. Though he hasn't played to his potential always, I've a faith in him. I wish many more centuries would come from his wand. Mortaza, Tapash, Nazmul, Rafique, Bashar, Aftab every one has a fair share of credit of this victory. I hope Bangladesh will continue to win. I've a poem dedicated to Ashrafu:

Thank you boy  
For the joy,  
Thank you for  
The match we enjoy.  
**Solaiman Palash**  
East Jurain, Dhaka 1204



PHOTO: AFP