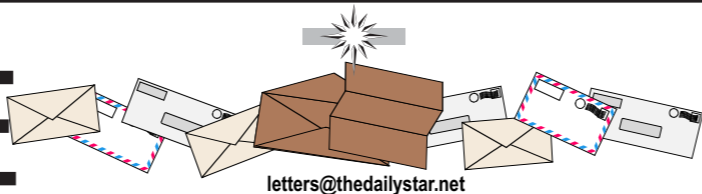


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



Intense scrutiny of Muslim society



Why has there been such intense scrutiny of Muslim society for the last fifteen years (that is, even before 9/11)?

I recall The Economist publishing a survey of 'Islam and the West', pointing out all our so-called deficiencies: how we (mis)treat women, lack democracy, lack our reformation, and so on.

It was, however, the West that encouraged the Islamisation of Muslim countries. Under Yahya Khan, it was the United States that aided military crackdown against a secular movement; under General Zia-ul-Huq, Pakistani society was radicalised: the brave Mujahideen were fighting the common enemy in Afghanistan, the godless Soviet Union.

Earlier, General Suharto's Muslim Indonesia was welcomed after Sukarno's communist interlude.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Mujahideen turned inevitably against the West and its Middle Eastern policy.

The West now began to try to de-Islamise society. Sermons previously directed against the Soviet Union were now directed at us: our entire civilisation was wrong.

This is remarkable in view of the similarities between Muslim society and other Asian societies. In Japan, women don't work; until Viagra came up, they were denied the pill and had to undergo abortions regularly. In South Korea, the ratio of male to female births has increased! In 1987, it was 109 boys to 100 girls; by 1992, the figure was 114! Similar statistics are available for India and China. Indeed, in India, there have been several cases of *sati* in recent years, and these have been quietly ignored by the western media. The Palestinian issue was bound to resurface after the cold war. And when Saddam lobbed a few missiles at

Israel, he sealed his own doom and his people's. The de-Islamisation that we see going on now is, like Islamisation before it, purely in the interest of western powers.

Iftekhar Sayeed, Dhanmandi, Dhaka



For free and fair elections

Round table discussions, seminars, dialogues, etc are being held every day throughout the country on holding free and fair elections. Political parties, groups, alliances, are offering reform proposals on this important national issue. Foreign diplomats, donor agencies based in Bangladesh are also found anxious to see a free and fair election in Bangladesh. Some diplomats are even eager to hold an international conference in Dhaka before the next general election of the country. But it is very interesting to note that

USA to organise a similar seminar in Washington to discuss the innumerable flaws in the democratic processes and other conflicting political issues of these countries? Frankly, the seminar could be held on any other day "except on a Tuesday." Trust begets trust. The problem today between the poor third world countries and the West is that the west has embarked on a two-pronged frontal attack, the silent and the violent to culturally morally and ethically invade our countries. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

These developed nations of the

very important (in the case of other important monuments it has been through design competitions). A public structure built with the taxpayers' money, which intends to honour the history of our nation, should be handled with great responsibility. **Fuad Mallick Gulshan, Dhaka**

Djuice and Bangla

Over the past few months djuice, a phone package specially made for youngsters, has been using peculiar phrases in its advertising campaign. Phrases like 'fao gejano', 'jotil prem', 'poora tashki' etc are visible

example, a cyber game competition will be held next month and to enter that we need to pass in a quiz that only djuice subscribers have access to.

In the face of competition in the mobile phone sector, GP is only focusing on giving value to these new customers, and the millions of old customers are not valued. Back to Bangla, is there any way we can protect our mother tongue? **Rizwan Shamim Ramna, Dhaka**

CEC meeting

Recently, in a move to improve upon the electoral system, the CEC invited 99 political parties to comb over the voter rolls for imperfections. The

necessity of inviting the political parties to fix the voter rolls baffles me. People have been exasperated at the number of parties invited. The rationale of the argument goes that most of these parties are "sign-board-only" parties and inviting them to such an event only lends legitimacy to them; the leaders of such "parties" are only looking for photo ops. But their legitimacy should be denied by the voters through rejection at the polls, not by the CEC.

When Marx formulated the concept of communism, I bet it seemed pretty outlandish too, but history bore him out and once the 'un-tenability' of communism was proved that period of world history was phased out. That is how untenable points of view should be dealt with, not through denial by the government authorities.

Mahmud Hasan

One-mail

Costly mercy

The recent mercy given to a death sentence convict is proof of the nation's degradation in all sectors. Law is the last resort where people go for an impartial justice. But the recent happenings in and around courts give us an impression that even a lawmaker can manipulate justice. Law is enforced if the powerful desire. Even they do not hesitate to send members of law enforcing agencies to harass the less powerful. These members with little knowledge of civility try to win the hearts of their superiors by swooping on the targets.

My question is "Was the honourable President under pressure to grant mercy for the murderer?" The president was a university teacher and he was

against any kind of lawlessness as we noticed him during his bold role played against a military dictator. He is supposed to be a conscience bearer.

Kamalluddin Ahmed Shamoly, Dhaka

Public health at stake!

Reports on unsafe food and fruits are coming out almost daily in the newspapers. Unscrupulous people have been doing this brisk business for a long time. A few years back report was published on serving dog's meat in a restaurant at Aricha. Police arrested people with dead chickens that were to be supplied to restaurants. Since the last few weeks some newspapers have been publishing reports on adulterated and poisonous food and fruits. All these reports reveal that our public health has been badly compromised.

Taking all these foods and fruits might cause serious health problems. Children are more vulnerable to this unsafe food. Though it is late, we are assured that the government has started taking legal actions against those who are involved in such businesses.

Laws should be made tough to restrict sale of unsafe food.

Mallik Akram Hossain

University of Hong Kong

Good indeed that the government officials have started digging into production and sale of adulterated foods.

The drive should be a sustained one and people need to be made aware of the quality of foods that they are ingesting.

Md. Naim Uddin

Uttara, Dhaka

My heartfelt thanks to the reporters of The Daily Star and The Ittefaq for publishing a series of reports on adulterated and poisoned foods. I also appreciate the steps taken by the home ministry to form mobile courts to stop sale of adulterated foods and substandard goods. I praise Dhaka City Corporation for forming a team which raided some shops and filed cases against them.

I hope this drive will be continued by the government on a permanent basis. People are demanding safe food and stern action against food adulterators and urging the authorities to continue the drive and to enact new laws to ensure safe

food in the country.

Mostafa Kamal

East Shewarapara, Dhaka

Undoubtedly what the mobile courts are doing is a good thing (and all credit goes to all the dailies involved in focusing on this matter) and we can only hope that it will yield positive results. Since they have undertaken this venture, it is my belief that they should carry it out properly. In the western world, restaurants can be shut down for little violations and here restaurants and eateries are being fined as little as Tk. 800! That amount is nothing for the restaurant owners, they will pay and continue to take risks with our lives.

Our bodies, our health. Let people learn the consequences of their actions, greed and irresponsibility, to a point so that they and others never do it again.

What have we become? What sort of people live in a society where there is not an iota of truth or decency in our souls? How do we sleep at nights when we can poison food that people eat, when nothing is 100% pure or original or unadulterated? I remember once this young man had come with an uncle of mine from London and he got himself the shortest possible crew cut just because he thought that there may be no barbers here in Dhaka and I had sneered and asked if he thinks we live in a barbaric society? Apparently, we live in a society far worse than a barbaric one, we live in one devoid of any morality, honesty, decency, ethics, honour, nobility and any quality remotely resembling these. We are so caught up in our lust and greed for money that we seem not even to fear the Almighty anymore. Well we may escape answering here where time ends but I strongly recommend that we remember that eternity awaits us with open and 'fiery' arms. **Zeenat, On e-mail**

Thanks to the mobile court constituted by the DCC who have booked some restaurants, hotels, and sweetmeat shops who were cheating us by offering us stale and adulterated foods. Can't believe that those restaurants which we often used to visit to satisfy our taste buds, were actually slow-poisoning us.

Anjana, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

I must admit that the steps taken to introduce mobile courts to inspect foods in various restaurants are a great effort. Also thanks to the media which has played a vital role in repeatedly highlighting this

crucial issue in the newspapers. A few days back, I read in the newspaper that one of the restaurants was fined for using imported ketchup, which did not have BSTI label on it.

My question is, why were these being sold or imported in the market without the BSTI labels, in the first place. Where were the authorities responsible for monitoring these issues all these days? Why are these popping up suddenly? We need to dig into the issue. We need to find out the root cause behind these and take tough measures to stop these from happening.

However, we must not forget that this has to be a routine affair.

Sabina Naz, Panthopath, Dhaka

Help the meritorious

I would like to mention the helping hand the Honourable Minister extended to a poor boy who got GPA-5 in SSC. However, there was no follow up news on the other boy, who also got GPA-5, named Shirajul who is a rickshaw-puller himself. He needs help too. Or we might lose talents just because we can't afford the cost of studying in college.

I would request the Honourable Minister to help this lad as well.

Intekhab

Mohakhla, Dhaka

Privatising the railway

For years Bangladesh Railway had been perceived as the cheapest transport service provider in the country. It had contributed enormously in the economy as one of the biggest employer in the public sector. For years it suffered from lack of investment, which ultimately led the Railway into becoming one of the biggest losing ventures of the government. Perhaps saying it a 'venture' would be wrong as for long the Railway had been taken as a 'service provider' rather than a commercial venture. And as a 'service provider' our railway is far away from providing any decent service to its users rather it is a provider of 'jobs' and one of the biggest 'absorber' of public money. Policymakers must ask themselves if we ought to keep it as is or do 'something' about it, and that 'something' cannot only be making the railway a 'corporation' but 'privatising' parts of its operations.

Recently, our finance minister agreeing with the donor agencies, said plans are under way to make the railway a 'corporation'. Needless to say, given the timing of his statement and opposition from the Transport Minister, we are not going to see any significant change being made in the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, we have the unionist politicians who are ready to mobilise thousands of people against any attempt to make the Railway a corporation.

As for me, I simply cannot understand the logic behind keeping this massively losing sector in government hand. In my view not only the losing concerns, even the profit making ventures of the public sector must be privatised. Those who oppose it, are either doing so on pure political grounds, or they lack the very basic understanding of free market economy.

They must know that in capitalism government is there to play a 'referee's' part, not to engage in the 'game' itself, they are there to regulate the economy in the right direction not to operate it. When the government starts taking part, it destroys the natural balance of the market place, creates unfair advantages for the inefficiently run public sector. I wonder when will they realise it.

Chowdhury Mohibul Hassan

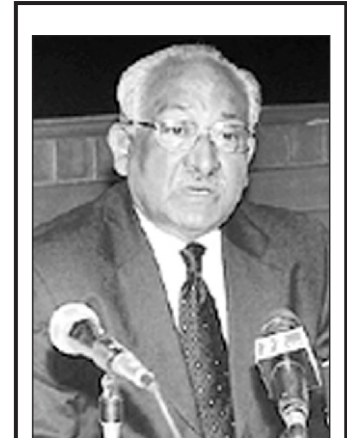
London, UK

Khilgaon Flyover

The long awaited Khilgaon Flyover has undoubtedly eased the congestion of the surrounding roads to a great extent. However, few flaws have emerged since its inauguration. First of all, the facilities for the pedestrians have been ignored completely. The roads, to and

from Khilgaon rail-crossing, have discontinuous footpath with variable length ranging from 1.50 ft. to 6 ft. In some patches there is no footpath at all. The roads in front of 'Khilgaon Telephone Exchange' and the road near 'Bashabo foot overbridge' are two such examples.

The pavement narrows there so abruptly that hardly one truck can pass and in such narrow patches of roads the pedestri-



Saifur's observation

I quote from the DS of (01-Aug): "he admitted, there cannot be good governance in the corporate sector, if bad governance prevails in the country as a whole". So, is the minister admitting that the present BNP government is guilty of bad governance? Also he is on record of saying: "Jumboscale corruption is going on even in the European and OECD countries". As such, is he implying that there should be no hue and cry over rampant corruption in Bangladesh? The Honourable Minister is much better of an accountant than to understand that, even 0.01% (as of GDP) corruption in those developed countries will look huge to us, as a sum, as the total output of economy of this country is very insignificant in the global context. But, corruption is eating away large chunks of that meagre figure even! **CNR, Chittagong**

ans have to risk their lives. To worsen the situation, the authorities have banned the pedestrians from crossing the flyover and there is no safety provision kept for the pedestrians.

In these circumstances, thousands of pedestrians use the flyover daily being forced to violate the rules. May I urge the DCC authorities to make safety provisions on the flyover for the pedestrians by footpath-like-grade separation coupled with proper marking. A lot of people come to visit the flyover during weekends and they will be relieved as well. Moreover, the roads below the flyover should be widened and of uniform width.

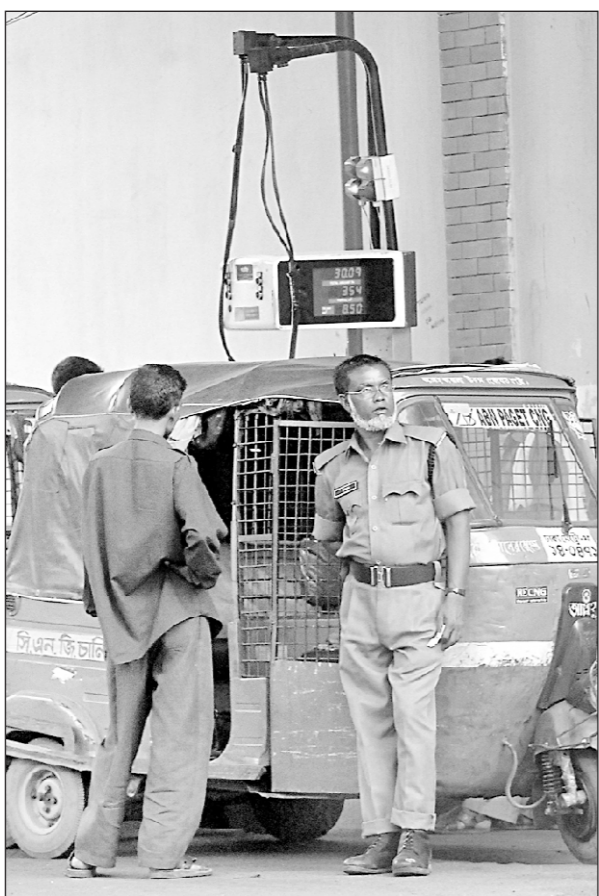
Besides, there should be footpath of adequate width along both the sides and while designing footpaths the possibility of encroachment by roadside traders should be kept in mind.

Engr. Hafizur Rahman Arman, East Bashabo, Dhaka

CNG METER HOAX

I commute between Uttara to Sayedabad for my work. I usually avail the public bus service often but take the CNG as well. A ride in CNG costs about Tk 110. But last Thursday when I hired a CNG, I was perplexed seeing the meter running faster than it should. It was showing 100 meter run for about every 60-70 meter. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the discrepancy. While I asked the CNG driver about it, he gave me a mischievous grin and said nothing. I eventually had to pay as per the meter reading. I would request the law enforcers to enquire into the loaded or manipulated meters. The CNG commuters should also be vigilant. **Shabbir Ahsan**

Uttara, Dhaka



everyone is echoing the same tune that in order to have credible elections a strong and fully independent Election Commission is a must. But is it sufficient for free and fair election? Whatever strength is given to and how much independent be the Election Commission (EC), it will not suffice to hold free and fair elections in Bangladesh in the present situation, until and unless the political parties practise fair politics. If the political parties are honest, sincere and patriotic, and do not nominate black money holders and criminals from their respective parties, elections will be free and fair even if the EC is weak.

So reforms, if any, should be brought first in the political parties as well as in the attitude of political leaders of the country. **Momtazul Islam**

Banani, Dhaka

Diplomats

This has reference to one Dr. Abdullah Dewan's article published in the opinion column of DS on July 29 under the caption "Diplomats, Constitution and the Foreign Minister."

I have mixed feelings. Our Foreign Minister may have been rather "undiplomatic" but there is much truthfulness and honesty of purpose in his statements. To my mind he has tried to call "a spade a spade". The learned author must realise that if not of this magnitude there are issues which are not only worthy of discussion but can be hotly debated on crossroads, the innumerable travesties of democratic practices in many of the developed countries of the world including that of the most powerful nation of the world.

Has it ever occurred to him that these high profiled diplomats may have a different agenda of their own? I for one no longer have any faith in this grouping up of diplomats of Europe and the West. Will the professor help our Mission in the

world are out as "aggressive vendors of Democracy and Freedom patented by them". **Shamsher Chowdhury**

One-mail

Murder of a Brazilian

The anti-terror squad has terrorised all the communities residing in UK. I think the UK government should immediately bring the trigger happy policeman to book and adequately compensate the family of the innocent victim.

It is now clear that the British police is influenced by the Israeli 'modus operandi' of shooting innocent people without giving them any opportunity of defending themselves.

The Human Rights Commission can send a team to investigate this cold blooded murder. This is definitely an act of state level terrorism.

This single case of killing can be regarded as part of 'a bigger plan' against a particular community.

S. M. Khalid Chowdhury, UK

DCC monument

The DCC's intention of building a monument for the martyrs of the 1969 mass upsurge is a very commendable one. It is important for a nation to remember its heroes. It is also important that they be remembered in a befitting manner, with due sobriety, grace and respect. We associate memory with visual experience in such structures. Savar Monument, Rayerbazar Memorial and Shaheed Minar are a few examples.

But the structure that the DCC intends to build at Asad Gate is a visual cacophony. It is at complete odds with the statement it should make. It looks like an alien spaceship or at best a shopping centre. I wonder what 'recreational' facilities it will have and how recreation is associated with an event where people lost their lives. How the DCC selects the design is

on billboards all around the town. Although they are meant to be "cool", I think they are exposing the young generation to a wrong form of Bengali, and encouraging them to talk in that manner. Moreover, being an old prepaid

subscriber of GP for so many years, I feel discriminated when djuice customers are given special opportunities exclusively. For



My illusive pran-bondhu!

I have always wondered why those poems, songs and stories, for one reason or other, keep referring to this imaginary lover who doesn't exist. The biggest offenders are songs where almost every song has the mention of this imaginary friend/lover. You might quickly point your fingers at those movie-songs, but even civilised-weights like Nazrul Rabindra Sangeet 'Adhunik' songs are immune from this. not be that explicit or all those sanitised around the bush is talking about the Anyway, I have listed some of the names this imaginary lover, English and Hindi.

Bangla: Aashique, bondhu, dewana, kaala/kaaliya, koinna, manik, mashooque, mitro, moni, mothi, moyna,

nath, prano-nath, premik, priya, pryothoma, raii, rongela, roshik, roshiya, roshomothi, ruposhi, rothon, shaam, shai, shathi, shojoni, shokhi, shujon, etc.

English: Babe, baby, beau, darling, dear, honey, love, lover, sugar, suitor, sweetheart, sweetie, etc.

Hindi: Aashique, aawara, baalma, deewana, dilbar, dildaar, dilher, dil-jaana, dilruba, dost, dulara, gulfam, gulzaar, hamdam, hamnashi, hamnava, hamsafar, harjai, hasina, jaan, jaanu, janam, mashooque, mastana, mehbooba, meherbaan, mitwa, parwana, piya, saajan/saajni etc. Of course, people sometimes use the same word to refer to different people. A mother, for example, may use the word 'love' to call her little child, but she may also use the same word to refer to her husband. Bauls on the other hand, usually refer to the Creator as their friend. Here are two lines from a song by Baul-Shah Abdul Karim:

Tumar hathe kolom re bondhu, tumar hathe lekho Ami kemne hoilam dushi bujhina shei pak-o Khujiya pailam-na re bondhu, O-re bondhu tumi kuthai thako.

Azad Miah, Oldham, UK