

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.

Website for new moon

Through the courtesy of your columns, I wish to bring to the notice of the official moon sighting committee and those with Adobe-reader internet facilities, a website maintained by HM Nautical Almanac Office which gives the visibility of the new moon for largely populated centres on earth. (Moon sighting is very problematic in latitudes greater than 60 degrees North or South).

The website is: http://websurf.nao.r.i.ac.uk

After getting the website main menu on the screen 'I accept' and 'Thank you' buttons need to be pressed for the astronomical data screen. Then pressing the Moonviz. option on the left hand side of the screen will allow the name of the place to be put in and then if latitude and longitude of the place is correct the date around which the visibility is required need to be put in.

Caution is required as for this Almanac Dhaka is still spelt Dacca and that country names are not listed but only exact place names. The date put in should be the date of the expected astronomical new moon or Amabashya (i.e. fully dark moon or no-moon) found from local almanacs.

If place name, latitude, longitude and date are correct, pressing the OK button will give a table for the chosen date as well as for the following few days until moon sighting visibility is in no doubt. The timings of sunset and moonset for each day and their difference known as 'lag time' is given for each date with comments about how visible would be the new crescent moon. There are 6 grades of visibility, A is clearly visible, B is visible under perfect conditions, C is 'may need optical aid to find crescent moon', D 'will need optical aid to find the crescent moon', E is 'not visible with a telescope' and lastly F 'Not visible, below the Danjon limit'.

This website can be used by authorities to look for and confirm the crescent moon only when it is likely to be seen and not prematurely, thus reducing chaos in this matter. If a particular place or country is clouded over, neighbouring countries can be consulted on this. By proper use of these tables an official Islamic calendar for the whole year (or for several years) can be drawn up in advance by local authorities reducing uncertainty and chaos for religious festivals.

For the interest of readers the

website data for Dacca shows Ramadan to start from the evening of Wednesday, 5 Oct 2005 (lag time 65 minutes, visibility A but not before this date), and Ramadan to end with the evening of Thursday, 3 Nov 2005 (lag time 47 minutes, visibility A, but not before this date), with Eid ul Fitr on the morning of Friday, 4 Nov 2005, with a total of 29 days of fasting.

Shafi Ahmed London

Great going!

The religion card has always been a great winner. Mr. Bush plays it well, the BJP had a landslide and I was just beginning to wonder when we'd have the fortune to see it surfacing in our sweet home turf. With the upcoming election, the countrywide terror seemed just the right spice for the time. Great going Mr. Tofael, you just put everything in perspective. Ah! politics, what a great game.

A reader One-e-mail

"The past is never dead"

I have been reading and avidly following the 4-part series on the events that led to the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I could not help but notice that Mr. Lawrence Lifschultz was vivid in declassifying the events that took place on the horrid night of August 15, 1975. However, he was unclear on certain issues.

He had hinted at the role played by the CIA, Mr. Henry Kissinger and the United States in the plot to 'overthrow' Sheikh Mujib. However, he had not given any proof of their involvement. I don't know how the US government will treat this document. It had been speculated by quite a few people in Bangladesh as to the CIA's involvement in the assassination.

Nonetheless, I salute Mr. Lifschultz as well as The Daily Star for bringing the truth behind the curtains that will hopefully answer a lot more questions. I hope one day I would get the chance to meet Mr. Lifschultz and personally extend my deep appreciation and gratitude for his work, and hopefully one day the Bangladesh government will honour him for his contribution to revealing facts of these events.

Akhter Salim Fahmi Gulshan-1, Dhaka

A BLACK DAY

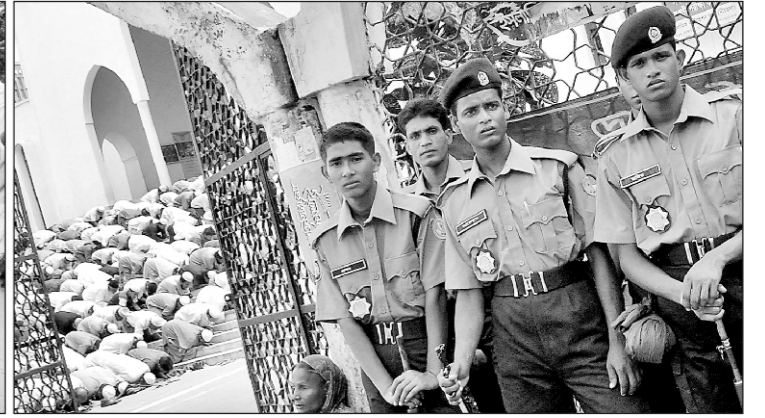


PHOTO: AFP

The entire Bangladeshi community here in Sunway University College, Malaysia, finds the recent bombings horrifying. The incident shows that we are facing a serious problem. On behalf of all the students, I condemn these attacks and I hope that the entire country would unite to eliminate this menace.

Bangladesh as a country should be moving forward, and not towards self-destruction. I sincerely hope that the government will take stern action against these people. I also hope that the opposition will assist the government in this regard.

Sheikh Tanzeb Islam Sunway University College Malaysia

The gruesome and ruthless incident of simultaneous bombings on August 17 has shaken the entire nation. This cowardly and organised attack has once again raised big questions about our national security, our intelligence agencies and overall failure of the government and the politicians.

From the Chittagong arms scandal to the August 21 bombings of last year, the government is still not able to find the criminals and has shown little or no interest to find them out. The statement made by the home minister regarding the bombings has raised some serious questions about the efficiency and willingness of our intelligence and law enforcement authorities. This is really a wake up call for everyone to stand up together against terror and take immediate action. At the same time, the opposition parties should not make this an issue to topple the government. We have seen enough rivalry among the political parties, but now it is time to be united for the greatest interest of our nation.

M. Yamin Iftekhhar Chowdhury Atlanta, USA

I condemn in the strongest possible words the August 17 bombings. The perpetrators would not succeed in achieving their goal because bomb attacks won't help them grab state power. It would not be possible to blackmail the nation by creating a pandemonium.

Cowards always attack from behind but their defeat is inevitable in the long run. Harris, JU

The bomb attacks are the result of the government's denial of existence of Islamic extremists in Bangladesh.

Time & again they refused to admit the truth that extremists do exist in the country.

So the extremists got the opportunity to launch the bomb attacks. They have a countrywide network & have the capability to create havoc. They want to exploit the sentiments of the Muslims & they are against all progressive thoughts.

The countrywide bomb attacks have proved that our intelligence agencies are unable to face the situation. They have to think ahead of the extremists.

Solaiman Palash East Jurain, Dhaka

Bangladesh was rocked by simultaneous bomb attacks in 63 towns. The pattern of attacks reminds me of recent bombings in London. Already the arrested JMB persons confessed to their involvement in the bombing.

The problem is that the ruling coalition does not want to blame the JMB or any other hard-liners, rather they want to shift the blame to a foreign intelligence agency. But that is not helping us.

Jewel Ahmed Basabo, Dhaka

The home ministry spokesman's briefing states that "26 suspects were taken to the Joint Interrogation Cell in Dhaka and more would be interrogated for information on the attack and the attackers". Unfortunately, no time frame was given indicating when this would be complete. Maybe, it could be twelve days, or even twelve months; no one knows! As reported earlier there was a directive from the government to catch all AL suspects. Later it was withdrawn, as identity of suspects could be international, and the investigation time interminable. That is the logic and fallacy that we have to live with!

Interestingly enough, another new item in the media states that the Jamaat-e-Islam Amir Md. Motiur Rahman Nizami on 20 August accused RAW of India as the mastermind, AL as patron and also that Mossad of Israel might have been involved in it!

A frightened citizen Dhaka

17th August 2005, I will always remember this as my birthday and the day Bangladesh broke out from being a tolerant democratic country to an Islamic fundamentalist country. The bombings shall haunt Bangladesh more than we can guess.

Business, travel, religion, economy, culture --almost every area has been hit. This massive bombing was nothing but a vibrating alert to the general public. The attackers have been operating in the country for over a decade now, and this recent event has actually obliged us to open our eyes and stand up against the barbaric people inhabiting our land. The intellectuals and learned people of society should stop talking in seminars and get on the ground to educate the general public on religion, terrorism and tolerance. Much has been said but least has been done. The actual attackers are deprived of happiness, food and education, without these basic elements their options of survival are limited.

Let all of us save our country and work together for a solution against terrorism and revive the spirit of our independence-freedom, rights and justice- which have been greatly undermined.

Mashruf Habib Connecticut, U.S.A

We were shell-shocked at the gruesome bomb attacks across the country. Sixty three districts of Bangladesh were bombed concurrently. After the blasts, as usual, the BNP and the AL blamed each other for this heinous act. Has our country been Talibanised? Most of the bombs were blasted in front of courts, banks and other important installations.

An well-organised Islamic militant group is desperate to destabilise our country. We are greatly concerned. The government seems to be indifferent to our security. The BNP led four-party alliance government shrugs off the worry of the people. They do not want to admit that there is any militant group in our country. Why are they reluctant to pulverise the militant groups? Why do they try to bypass the militant issue? What do the sluggish and impotent intelligence agencies of our country do? If such incidents occur regularly, Bangladesh will be boycotted by most of the countries of the world. The donors will not help us. The foreign traders will say goodbye to us forever. Some unruly hooligans will rule our country.

Who will salvage us from this tinderbox? Molla Mohammad Shaheen Dept of English, DU

Trading of allegations and counter allegations between the two mainstream political parties is the main

cause behind the extremists becoming so bold that they could explode bombs across the country. To thwart the attackers from doing such harm to the country, our prime need is to attain political consensus. I personally see no ray of hope in this domain without a mass movement by common people.

Our so-called educated and elite people are busy meeting personal parochial interests, which normally go against the interest of the nation. Our intelligence agencies are not doing their job.

Bazlur Rahman Dhaka University

The series of bomb blasts occurring in the country on 17 August 2005 was barbarity at its worst and no word is enough to condemn it. Violence is not new in the country, but such orchestrated bomb blasts are utterly unprecedented not only in Bangladesh but also in the subcontinent. We are jolted.

The intelligence agencies have to provide answers to our queries.

Anis Rahman University of Dhaka

I am really agitated hearing the news of the series of bomb blasts in a synchronised way in Bangladesh. In London the metropolitan police along with other agencies tracked the attackers not only by CCTV footage but also by tracking the phone calls in the mobile networks. Technology is playing a vital role in nabbing the terrorists. I would request the authorities in Bangladesh to investigate the telephone networks to find out the communications among the perpetrators who co-ordinated the heinous acts in 63 districts. There is no doubt that these people were planning this attack for several weeks prior to this fateful date. They might be using the net even now to have shelters in safe places. Time is very important in such investigations and police and other agencies have to act very fast to track down the cells.

S. Uddin London

'Islamic extremism' looks like a recent coinage for the earlier term used for 'Islamic fundamentalism'. This recent coinage and use of the term has possibly surfaced due to the reality that the term fundamentalism failed to make any headway into the minds of the intelligent people suffering lately from spiritual starvation all over the world. Islam is middle of the road, and

there is no place for any form of extremism in it. But one has to be very careful to define what is extremism and what is not. Muslims, much less Bangladeshis, have hardly been known for resorting to any form of extremism on religious grounds. The Muslim rulers and the masses in the past were very open minded and tolerant to non-Islamic beliefs and people and so they are still today. They lived side by side with mutual respect and dignity.

Of late, things have changed in some degree not only in Bangladesh but elsewhere as well. But why is this deviation from age-old norms of behaviour and attitude?

M. T. Hussain Ibrahimpur, Dhaka

The whole country waited for the return of the prime minister from China and to the utter relief of the panic-stricken countrymen Begum Khaleida Zia shortened her tour. However, after returning she kept mum and asked her ministers to make no comments about the bomb incident. After all, newspapers, 'the major enemy of the state', will not get much news if ministers stop facing newsmen! Well, the August 17 incident was too serious to be forgotten easily. Unlike the August 21 incident in which the AL was attacked, the August 17 bombing targeted the whole nation. After the August 21 incident, the four-party alliance put blame on the victims for killing themselves. The four party supporters endorsed this view because their political rivals were killed. But this time the bomb attack did not discriminate between the AL and the BNP. Who is to blame? As usual the Awami League. But this time the four party alliance is also busy discovering foreign hands. Yes, there is foreign hand behind the attack. But the alliance will not go after that foreign power because it will not suit its political purpose. Many of the arrested people had gone to Afghanistan, Kashmir and other M-E countries. They admitted having links with some of those countries. They might have had close links with the intelligence agencies of other countries. Will the government go after these? No. Because the government will always try to appease the bombers for gaining political advantage.

Nazmul Hasan Oshawa, Ontario

our youngsters? utterance like "fao gajano," "tashk," "Ajaira," "Hebby chalu" etc are simply slang indicating a negative formation of Bangla which is a by-product of cultural deviation. Being a proud student of DU in the early nineties.

Any way, one should not be blamed as hypocrite if one stands for originality, purity and civility. Rather finger should be pointed to the patrons of artificiality, distortion and cultural bankruptcy. Md Sazzad Hossain Narail



Pope's sermon

I commend Pope Benedict XVI for his message in Germany calling on Christianity and Islam to work together to end terrorism, which he said represented "the darkness of a new barbarism."

The recent chain of blind violence we are witnessing around the world is the result of scandalous injustices and imbalances that create conditions favouring an uncontrollable explosion of the desire for revenge. When fundamental rights are violated, it is easy to fall prey to temptations of hatred and violence. Nonetheless, we must keep in check our base impulses and together work to build a global culture of solidarity that restores hope in the future to the young.

The Pope said, "Terrorism of any kind is a perverse and cruel decision, which shows contempt for the sacred right to life and undermines the very foundation of all civil society. If together we can succeed in eliminating from our hearts any trace of rancour, in resisting every form of intolerance and in opposing every manifestation of violence, we will turn back the wave of cruel fanaticism that endangers the lives of so many people."

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is a vital necessity for our future. As the Pope stated "If we can continue to coexist in dialogue, it will send a signal that the theory of a 'clash of cultures' is baseless. He added, "The more religious and cultural communities can learn about one another, the more they will realise that there is no reason for hostility."

Paul Kokoski, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Djuice and us

While visiting Dhaka a couple of months back, I could not help but notice a few billboards and TV commercials on the new mobile communication service provider Djuice. I particularly noticed the uniqueness of advertisement of the product. Even though I admit I could not quiet understand the slogans like 'kothin koshto' or 'heavy josh', I quickly realised that these are some common words in the vocabulary of current Bangladeshi youth.

There has been criticism of these catchy phrases that the particular advertisement agency deliberately used to add to the raciness and humour that the youth use figuratively nowadays. Since the target market of the company is the youth of the country, in my opinion, it is absolutely fine for them to try to use phrases that the youth can relate to, of course within social and moral decency; after all, that is the whole point of advertising a product.

I can still remember the unusual and absorbing TV commercials like 'Olympic battery' or 'macher rajalish, batfir raja Phillips' as I was growing up in Dhaka in the 80s. They stood out to the TV viewers among hundreds of other ads only because of their refreshing uniqueness. Djuice commercials are at least a relief from ugly gyrating of certain body parts of females in the name of TV commercials, right?

Halimul Mannan Louisiana, USA

Recently GrameenPhone introduced a new package called Djuice.

This offers some special benefits like reduced call rates. However, we are very concerned about a few aspects of the youth brand. The ads of Djuice whether on TV or newspapers use a very informal form of Bangla, which deteriorates the originality of the language like "kat kat kor". It has also used English alphabets to write Bangla, which inspires the youth to write the language that way. Moreover, the TV commercials of Djuice hardly make any sense. Nayeem Islam

The Aga Khan School, Dhaka

GrameenPhone, the leading cellular phone company in Bangladesh which for its state-of-the-art network and service has achieved the position of being the companion of more than 3.5 million people across the country. Along with its sophisticated soundness in technical issues from its very beginning, there is one more thing to it: acting behind the scene. Its meaningful commercials in all types of media have impressed the common mass most. But after the

launching of GP's new package, Djuice, it seems the company has deviated from its original position. The marketing department of Grameen has tried to use the chat dialogues usually used by the youths like- Jotil Mood, Kothin Vaab, Cow-Cow, Fish-Fish and some others. They also have used some ugly amalgams of Bangla-English words which many have taken as a mistreatment to our mother tongue. Faysal Ahmed Alim Para, Chandpur

Child abuse in schools

In recent weeks The Daily Star has published several letters regarding child abuse at schools in Bangladesh.

To all abusive teachers: any teacher anywhere in the West would either laugh at you or attack you for using physical abuse - which translates into mental abuse, as well -- as a part of a child's education. In any Western country you would be taken to jail, then sued, after which you would never find future employment as a teacher - and quite rightly so. Are you trying to scare students into achieving good results? I would rather have an unafraid child who receives average marks. Fear is not the prime emotional state for learning, and anyway, fear and physical abuse obviously aren't working in this country's schools - look at the pass rate at any educational level in Bangladesh. Not a pretty statistic.

No one should lay a hand on any child, and no one should ever allow his or her children and family to be beaten by some brute brandishing a weapon. Everyone everywhere - parents and big brothers and the police and the entire legal system - has a responsibility to stand up for the little children who cannot protect themselves.

Sajid Chowdhury Gulshan

