

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.

Ban on hijab in France

In France the government has banned use of religious emblems in the primary and high school. As unlike the other religions there are some obligations on dress in Islam, it is only the Muslim community in France who have fallen victim to this new law.

According to Islam it's a must for the women and girls to use hijab as part of their dress. But due to the new law many innocent school-going Muslim girls in France had to drop themselves out of school while the others had to abandon their religious rituals to attend school. The French government is also going to enforce this law in their hospitals immediately. The French government and philanthropists have explained the cause behind this new rule as that in the present situation of the world religion is a very sensitive issue, so the children in their



schools may face some discrimination due to their religious identity which is usually exposed through the emblems and this may create a negative impact in the young minds.

In the national flag of France the three colours blue, white and red respectively represent liberty, equality and fraternity. The cause shown for the legislation of the new law is really a very logical explanation which is intended to establish equality among the French people removing all the discrimination but isn't it a violation of human

liberty - an obstacle for the people to follow their religious rituals? The young children of the minority ethnic groups may face discrimination for their identity but I think this can never be a solution to this problem.

So the French government should have paid attention to ensuring elimination of the ethnic discrimination by denouncing dogmatic views, rather than compelling any religious group to abandon their identity.

Kamrul Hasan
BUET

country where they can find a job - just any job.

What has been the government policy on emigration? It is no secret that the

Bangladesh government does not have any coherent migration policy for channeling its people abroad. If it had any, the situation would surely be different today in that many more people would have gone and found work in other countries.

Prof. Mahfuz R. Chowdhury
Long Island University, USA

Holidays

We have three sixty-five days in a year but how many days we work? There are two off days in a week. So weekly holidays will account for 104 days in a year. Generally, as per standard practice supported by related laws and regulations there are provisions for 10 days casual leave and 14 days sick leave. The average earned leave is about 17 days on a calculation based on 1 day EL for 21 days of work. The government declared holidays and optional holidays account for 24 days. Total holidays accumulate to 169 days hence workdays reduce from 365 days to 196 days, which is only 53% of the available days in a year.

Apart from this, strikes and other political disruptions take away some more working days. There had been instances of observance of more than 100 days of political strikes in a year in this country. Minimum days of strikes on an average are 12 to 15 days in a year.

In such a situation we surprisingly notice that some ethnic and religious groups demand that their days of festivals be declared holidays. Generally, we work for eight hours, meaning one third of

traffic congestion is severe, a lot of time is lost on the roads in traffic jam.

Much has been discussed about holidays, weekly holidays and working days, especially in the recent days. My point is there should be one day weekend on Sunday. The number of other holidays should be reduced except in the case of religious festivals.

Shakil Monzur
Halishahar, Chittagong

Supporting Pakis

This is in response to the letter 'Supporting Pakistani cricketers' by Zeenat Z Syed. Ms. Zeenat said that I went against the girls who supported Pak cricketers. But in my letter I wrote about those girls who supported Pakistan when Bangladesh first played against them in the World Cup. At that time one of their mothers said to my mother how her two daughters did not eat rice for several days because the handsome Pak cricketers they were besotted with were trounced by Bangladesh. Their mother was also very sad about the fact.

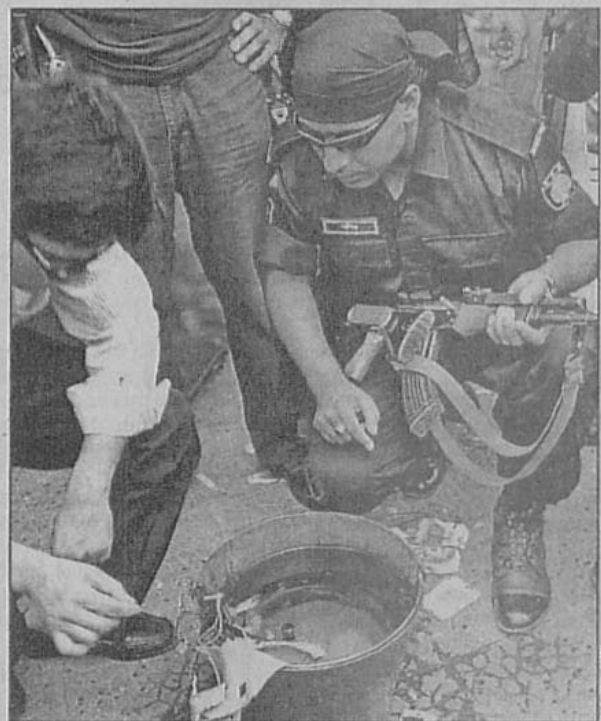
Not only this. I saw many girls having a hard time to swallow the fact that Bangladesh defeated Pakistan. I do not know how Ms. Zeenat feels about this. But I think this kind of behaviour is utterly unpatriotic, disgusting and unacceptable. Unfortunately, Ms. Zeenat missed the main point of my letter. I did not write to go against the Pakistan supporters. I wrote, "everyone has the right to support a team but the reasons offered by Mr. Upal for not holding Pakistan responsible for 1971 is not right." I wrote why his reasons are illogical and so will not repeat. I will request Ms. Zeenat to read my letter first before replying.

Muradana Ghias
Dept. of Economics, DU

Student politics and terrorism

Student politics and terrorism have become synonymous in Bangladesh. Though a handful of students are involved in student politics, they virtually control the academic matters in educational institutions. General students are the sheer victims of their whims. They call definite or indefinite strike whenever they get directives from their bosses. It is only due to student politics that many rightful movements like the movement protesting the heinous attack on Humayun Azad and the movement protesting the killing of Happy in a road accident could not be continued. They terrorise general students; even assault them if needed, to stop such movements. University dormitories are the safe places for these student terrorists. They even invite other outlaws to stay with them in dormitories as a secure hideout. Their terrorist activities are not limited to the campus only. They go beyond it and commit crimes for personal gain or political interest. Sometimes our government shows interest in banning it but no effective steps are taken afterwards. Can't the government dare to ban student politics and rescue general students from the clutches of nasty student politics,

August 17 blasts



When I heard of the bomb blasts across Bangladesh on Aug. 17, I was not surprised. The government and the people of Bangladesh have long denied that the country was home to terrorists. How rudely they were awakened.

What surprises me is that most people of Bangladesh are not condemning the blasts. The outpouring of anger towards the US and its allies when it started its war against terrorism was very vocal, but where are the voices when terror strikes on their front door. Even more surprising is that some people are even saying that the terrorism will not take roots in Bangladesh because there really is nothing for them to gain! How naive can people be. This is very sad indeed.

From what I find by reading The Daily Star it is that most Bangladeshis do not like the US, but welcome the money and resources it provides with open arms. There is so much support for the terrorists in the world, and Bengalees are just part of the problem, whether abroad or in Bangladesh, by not condemning the terrorists. If the US and its allies were so bad, why are the Sunnis/foreign fighters against the Iraqi people? Why are the Afghans not fighting in droves - it is only the Taliban.

Bangladesh and its people need to look inside and when they see terrorists amongst them, they should try to eliminate them. Waiting for the government to do it will see the country go straight into the hands of the terrorists.

S.R. Khan, NE USA

which is nothing but terrorism?
Mohammad Mizanur Rahman
Department of English
University of Dhaka

Postal service

As a regular user of postal service, I would like to bring a few things to your notice. A post office puts two seals on the mail: one with the receiving office name and date, the other with delivery office name and date. These are useful information to the recipient. Moreover, they have legal significance at times. But in almost all the cases, impressions of these seals are so hazy and smeared that it is impossible to read them. Would the postal authorities issue more legible seals to its offices, and ensure proper impression? There is a system of identifying post offices with Post Code. Putting the code in address ensures that the mail gets sorted easily. Post offices used to sell a

booklet listing all the post offices of Bangladesh and their codes. The book is out of stock for several years. Can the postal authorities reprint the book, or post a listing on the Web of all post codes and their corresponding areas?

The two-taka stamp is perhaps the most used one. But for a long time, only one version of this (National Diabetes Awareness Day '95) is available. Years back, many interesting stamps of this denomination were there, such as the Martyred Intellectual series. Would they come up with some interesting two-taka stamps?

Ashish Ahsan
Uttara, Dhaka

Abright girl

In Bangladesh, there are about 42 lakh children with mental and physical retardation, they belong to us, they are our brothers and sisters. For some reasons they are

unable to meet the natural need of the society, it is thus our duty and responsibility to help them overcome their inability. It is also the mandate of the government to provide all necessary support to the social rehabilitation department for this purpose. For instance, a wealthy person can easily support one or two children with a little amount of money. The same support is necessary for the society's poor and the sick.

Despite organising many national events for the handicapped children, they are not really getting the expected benefit. In many instances, the handicapped children are not equally encouraged for social rehabilitation. For example, Zakia who won three gold medals, a rare accomplishment among 7,500 participants in the 1999 Olympic contest held in North Carolina, USA was not asked to attend any subsequent events held at the national levels, although many others with lower accomplishments were being given national recognition. Zakia should have been nationally honoured, but the authorities remained unkind to her. I think, these children would be more benefited if they are given financial support at the family level, rather than medals.

We must acknowledge that we need to provide social support and justice to our handicapped children. It is our moral duty and national responsibility. We must go forward with this determination. In view of this, I am soliciting the attention of the social welfare ministry and other relevant organisations.

Syeda Nazma Ahmed Kona
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Tax reform

The revenue raised by the public sector plays a dual role in the developing countries. In addition to providing for public expenditure of the traditional type, it helps finance economic development. Even though a country may depend on external assistance for the latter, internal revenue does the necessary tasks of providing the 'counterpart funds' for aid-financed projects. The importance of an appropriate revenue system can therefore be hardly overemphasised.

To my mind, the main proposals for tax reform should be as follows: Both imports and domestic consumption goods be treated uniformly, with the VAT replacing both the import duty and domestic excises over a fairly short period. Inputs (both imported and domestic) be continued to be taxed, again by a VAT structure, until the VAT reaches the retail stage. The VAT rate structure should generally be non-uniform. Long-term revenue growth is unlikely to occur unless personal and corporate income tax can be adequately taxed. Hence the design of these taxes is of critical importance. Problems of administration, evasion, compliance and corruption are the challenges to be overcome here. A flat rate of land tax should preferably be administered by a local authority.

Engr. Mohammad Ariful Islam
Ramdebpur, Baghail, Tangail

'New Asia'

Recently, the 'Daily Ittefaq' published an alarming report on the activities of some militant groups to form a new country 'New Asia' that will include part of Bangladesh. These militant groups include Rohingyas of Myanmar and they are supported by some NGOs from the Middle East. These groups are very active in Bandarban and Cox's Bazar area and recently the Bangladesh Army recovered a huge volume of arms from Bandarban area.

I believe that the government, politicians, intelligence agencies are well aware of the activities of these groups. They may also be aware of the political party/parties who are supporting these groups.

To make political gain we always talk about imaginary threats by the big neighbouring country. Unfortunately, we are ignoring the real threat to our country because such ignorance is politically beneficial.

I would like to request the newspapers to bring out the truth about the conspiracy against the country.

Wasim Haider
Toronto, Canada

When will I get my shop?

I won a lottery and got a shop in the World Bank Housing Project of Chittagong in 2002. Still I didn't get my allotment. The Chittagong housing office said they had sent everything to the higher authorities, Dhaka for approval in 2002. Yet no approval came to the office in 4 years. One of the staff members said to me that if I spend some money in Dhaka I would get my plot easily. I don't know why they didn't issue the orders to hand over these shops to the public. This project has over 100 shops. Why this delay?

Habib Faruqi
One-mail

Manpower export

It is obvious that Bangladeshis in general could contribute more to their country's economic prosperity by going abroad than by staying home. Before the birth of the country in 1971, very few people even got the chance to go abroad. It is estimated that over four million Bangladeshis are now living abroad in one capacity or the other, though a great majority of them have gone as guest workers. For a country with an unemployment rate running as high as 40%, this is a matter of great significance.

Today, Bangladeshis can be found working in every continent except may be Antarctica. But as guest workers, their biggest concentration is in the

Middle East - Saudi Arabia being the largest provider of such jobs. The boom in the oil industry is the source of these jobs in the Middle East. Thus these jobs are expected to last as long as the oil boom lasts. The kind of jobs that Bangladeshis do in the Middle East and elsewhere as guest workers are mainly low-skilled contractual jobs. These workers must leave the host country when their contact expires. Therefore, these jobs would basically depend on the prosperity of the host countries. Nevertheless, these workers have become the main source of foreign exchange earnings for the country. In the year 2004, the country reportedly earned 3.3 billion dollars of foreign exchange from the remittances of Bangladeshis working abroad. This is quite a substantial amount of foreign exchange for Bangladesh. In fact, these remittances provided funds to fulfill most, if not all, of Bangladesh's foreign exchange needs.

Although the remittances of these workers are the main source of the country's foreign exchange earnings, most of these workers have gone abroad through private initiative, rather than through government endeavours. In their

attempts to go abroad, each year many people fall victim to various unscrupulous organisations whereby they stand to lose their families' last savings.

The government even fails to protect them from these criminals. Yet the lack of job opportunities at home continues to drive people abroad. Each year an increasing number of Bangladeshis seek employment outside the country. Desperation always leads to desperate measures. There are

Bangladeshis who are known to have undertaken the most



Superstitions still exist!

We heard many stories of superstitions either from our grandfathers, grandmothers or from others. But, gradually we all took them for mere superstitions. But in this 21st century one cannot but wonder when superstitions do exist among the people of the developed countries!

Looking closely, you'll see that footballers usually touch the soil of the field before entering the field and before leaving it as well. Players like Maradona, Batistuta, Ronaldinho do it regularly.

The same kind of gesture is popular among cricketers. After scoring a century or a half-century players look up to the sky. Some are seen kissing the very soil that brought them fame.

More interesting is the fact that some non-believers do the same! One wonders if these gestures are superstitions or just a way of expressing gratitude to the creator. Well, whatever is the case, it's nice to see them do so!

Rafiqul Islam Rime, Agrabad, Chittagong

gruelling journey on foot via the Sahara desert or via Eastern Europe by hiding in extremely overheated trucks in the hope of reaching an industrialised

the time available for us. Now one can find how much effective time we work to survive and is that sufficient? Again, in cities like Dhaka and Chittagong where

Katrina: what it tells



Call it natural, if you will. That is how most materialistic Americans, including George Bush, would tend to dub Katrina, which has left in its wake wholesale destruction of life and property in a whole city which was bustling with life the other day.

The calamity, unprecedented on American soil, makes Twin Tower or Andrew disaster pale into insignificance.

Cushing water, with twenty-foot high waves, swept away homes, cars and boats, depositing crumpled cars one above another like

toys and moving homes to distant locations, like a veritable watery juggernaut.

Soon there was a vast wasteland with homeless people. No food, no shelter. No potable water, no clean clothes. Thousands perished. The worst and the saddest part

of it was that help was not forthcoming soon. The nation which prides itself, though often falsely, of taking care of distant people in Vietnam or Kuwait, in Afghanistan or Iraq, stood in spineless silence before being goaded into action after a long-drawn culpable delay, when her own citizens were languishing and dying on their land!

People were crying for food, water and medical help. Battered corpses like carcasses were decomposing, the air suffused with stink, even days after the deluge. Diseases, including hepatitis, were spreading. The whole city, once wallowing in the residue of opulence of an extremely rich nation, now wore a look more of an impoverished part of Africa than of JK Galbraith's "affluent society", what to speak of LB Johnson's "great society".

The world simply finds it difficult to believe what it sees. As if the cup of astonishment was not yet full, the world got fed on a symbolic apotheosis. True, Nero sang while Rome was burning. But, to adduce a CNN footage, Bush was playing guitar while New Orleansers were groaning under a

terrible aftermath of what Shakespeare would call "dreadful heralds to astonish us." Symbolically, too, as if by providence during the same time, the embodied epitome of superpower's justice system left superpower for eternal abode!

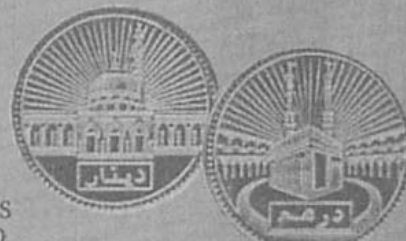
The US is a great nation. The people on average are nice, sportive, helpful. By and large, justice prevails on that land of plenty. When stray wrongs are done, the majority swoop on that to set things right.

Mind it, dear readers, on any soil there may emerge paranoid, aberrant leaders. They may make things go berserk. More virulently so, when falsity overtakes truth, when extreme pride and boundless prejudice stifle the sense of proportion, when mortals cross the limit set by the creator. Then he takes hold. On his order, nature (events not susceptible of explanation due to our exiguous capacity are euphemistically termed preternatural or supernatural) teaches us lessons. Natural? Yes, certainly, but the onus is on us to fathom the meaning. That exactly is Katrina.

Eklmur Raza, Lalmatia, Dhaka

Islamic currency

This is in response to the letter by Mr. A Mawaz on Sept. 21 about having an 'Islamic currency' to combat the US dollar and EURO.



This is a great idea in concept, but in practice it will never happen for the following reasons: With the snobbery and prejudice amongst the different races that make up the Islamic race, a unified currency would mean that someone would be exploited or given an unfair deal. For example, the Arabs perhaps think of Pakistanis as an inferior race that doesn't speak Arabic, and the Pakistanis made it clear from our war of independence that they think of Bangladeshis as less than human. There is no unity among the Islamic nations, as you correctly pointed out. Look at when the tsunami hit and deeply affected the largely Islamic Indonesia; the Arab nations gave a pathetic amount of aid (Saudi's gave \$10m US, UAE gave \$2m, Germany by contrast, gave \$600m), where was the brotherhood in the time of need? It seems that we are "fair weather" friends and your true brothers are those that share your pain and will help you in your time of need without using your disasters as an opportunity to give with one hand and steal with the other. Bangladesh needs to forget these sentimental notions of a big Islamic brotherhood and concentrate on building itself up economically through foreign investment albeit it from India, Japan, the USA or Europe. The Arabs have already invested \$7 trillion in the US; Islamic unification is clearly not their priority.

Rania Islam, Banani, Dhaka