

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.

Farhad Mazhar's remark on 1971

In two recent postings in an e-Network a friend of ours wrote the following with regard to Farhad Mazhar's remark on the liberation war of 1971: "As far as I understand from his text that [Farhad Mazhar] didn't undermine or tarnish the role of our liberation war or freedom fighters. He posits in his text that 'Pakistan tried to tag the freedom fighters or our people as terrorists. Are we terrorists?' He puts a note of question mark, which denotes that he used this to explain the on going issues in broader context. I think we should see his citizenship as part of his contribution in the ongoing debate."

is that Mazhar tries de-constructing/gelatinising the meaning of terrorism, pointing to the example of the then Pakistani state calling the freedom fighters of 1971 as terrorists.

Let us take out Mazhar's speech from our friend's quotation, and find out what Mazhar means by saying: 'Pakistan tried to tag the freedom fighters or our people as terrorists. Are we terrorists?' And, this is one of the reasons why I strongly disagree with Mazhar's remark about 1971, and especially thank all those who have unmasked "the monster in the belly" by sharing their provocative and scholarly thoughts.

Attack on Islamic parties

I read the news that some Islamic parties who are not part of the government were forced to abandon their meetings and processions due to police intervention.

The parties which are following the democratic path have every right to organise meetings and processions, regardless of their political ideology. The government cannot ignore this plain truth.

Taslim Hasan
University of Dhaka
Arresting JMB activists

Boosting crop production



We can bring about a revolution in boosting crop production, particularly rice and other important crops in our country. First, we need a large commercial scale cultivable land to grow the crops. To achieve that I think a group of farmers who own land in important areas known to us should be given a chance to lease out their land to the government for a year or so. If the government could invest on or purchase technology, such as auto-machineries, bio-sensors, GM crops, hybrid rice technology and apply it on to the leased land, it could yield high grain per unit land in a short time and thereby

increase profit and reduce food scarcity, and at the same time it could pay the farmers for their lease. There should be a survey prior to such commercial production. Even though it sounds unrealistic, the government with new technology and its professionals could train the farmers to learn the new farming methods on those leased lands concurrently. This way upon expiry of the lease the farmers could adapt to the new knowledge. But where would they get the machineries? The government could buy them from the countries like the US. These are expensive, but will be very useful.

The government could perhaps even try to take land on lease from other countries and use it for commercial production of crops. Myanmar is one country that might like the new idea. This way when the winter arrives, we won't have to worry about supply of rice.

I would like the agriculture ministry to consider this idea. The GDP of our country is largely dependent on agriculture. If we cannot accelerate the current pace of production, the population growth and natural disasters would threaten us with famine in the near future.
Toufiqur Rahman, Oklahoma



PLIGHT OF SAILORS

September 29 was the World Maritime Day. The government as well as the related organisations celebrated the day with enthusiasm.

This time, like every year, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) took the theme "The International Shipping Carrier of the World Trade." Obviously the trades between the countries are done by ships. The ships carry the raw materials and the finished products from one country to another. Behind every machine there is a mechanic or an operator to run and the personnel behind running the ships are seafarers. The navigator navigates the ships; the engineer runs the engine, the ordinary seamen work hard in the team to smoothen the operation of ship trading from country to country. The rules, regulations, various conventions are promulgated from time to time to regulate world shipping.

The sailors have to maintain the safety standards and keep environmental pollution to the minimum. But, alas, if we analyse the trend of salary fixing of seafarers over last 10/15 years, we see a gloomy picture, the trend is downwards. Above all, the right of shore leave for seafarers, when the ship calls at a foreign port, is denied. Nowadays, many neighbouring countries also impose restrictions/tight control on ship crew's shore leave. After hard work in a unique environment onboard a ship for months together, already fatigued, when a seaman is not allowed to leave the ship, he can only feel greatly frustrated. Many countries are imposing strict control on shore leave as an anti-terrorism measure.

Following the observance of Maritime Day, I appeal to the world maritime community to look into the plight of the sailors.
Capt. Mohammad Ali
Marine Surveyor and Consultant
Chittagong

For a few days, the lead news of most of the dailies is nabbing of JMB cadres in different areas of the countries. It is a positive development. It is also a good thing to find out the dens of the militants, but it should not be limited to JMB alone, rather the drive should also be extended to other parties, especially student outfits of different political parties which are engaged in illegal activities. There are many armed goons in these student organisations.

As a student of Dhaka University, I suggest that the government find out the armed cadres of the student organisations who are creating chaos in the educational institutions and spoiling the environment of education. The government needs the terrorists' service to stay in power and the opposition needs it to grab power. As a result, nobody dares to oppose the presence of these armed cadres on the campus.

So if the government wants to arrest the armed goons; it should do so, irrespective of their political affiliations. It should not be limited to JMB alone.
Mamun, DU

Choosing foods

There could be and there is a lot of reason for the soaring costs of living, particularly food. After waiting helplessly for a long time for the government, the opposition and the business community to ease our miseries, I have devised a plan for my survival. As a consumer I decided to exercise my right to choose what I wish to buy and eat. So I decided to forgo beef for a week, fish the next week, chicken any other week and so forth. I was wondering that perhaps if we, the consumer, can synchronise these beefless, fishless etc weeks, it may have the right kind of impact on the market.
Sazzad Hossain
One-mail

What is our future?

I have been reading a lot of stuff in different newspapers about the next election and the so-called "Tuesday Group", the civil society and so on. I really don't know what is going to save us from the present turmoil. We are a country which doesn't have a stable education system that could assure us of a better future.

I just saw the results of the HSC exams, saw lots of pictures of many students, happy faces. But the more I see these pictures the more I think of the picture of the reality. Just think for one minute, what are these kids going to do? Do they know? I don't think so, but I am telling you that it is a truth that not only our kids are bright to succeed anywhere but also our education system till HSC is pretty standard. But results like this would create false pressure on our higher

educational system; at least that is my guess. We already have a tradition of getting hearts broken while seeking admission in universities. Know it will come as a shock. Why, because most of us just don't get the subjects or universities of our choice. Our fate is dependent on an ever-changing admission system of the public universities, and the emergence of some substandard private universities. I am not against the private universities, because I was a student of one of them and many of them really maintain the standards. The shock will come to all these "good results" when they will see that the reality is that they are not just good enough to get into many of the universities. I just want to know where will these students go? Can the existing universities really ensure that most of them will end up with quality education? I don't think so. We need to do something about it. First, we have to make the higher education a privilege, so that the students realise that their education is valuable; either paid by the public or by their parents.

We have to make sure that they are not left behind. I would really love to see some polytechnic schools established at private level. The government should make it a mandatory part for every private university. If they have to operate they have to have a technical associate programme. It can be anything, culinary, E-commerce, anything.
We have to understand that our last hope is our future generation.
Nayem Hossain
California, US

Where is he?

It is alleged that a former Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Motijheel Thana masterminded the killing of Dhaka Commerce College student Momen over a land dispute. Recently the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) team arrested two culprits and they confessed that the killing was done on the directive of that OC. But the OC has not yet been arrested.
The government should ensure that nobody is above the law.
Al-Mamun Zakaria
Mirpur-2, Dhaka

Immigrants and British values

Immigrants (specially Muslims) are constantly castigated by the British politicians and media for not embracing the British values. But what are these values?
With so much pub-drinking, drug taking, football hooliganism and loutish behaviour and other criminal conduct spread over the land, and large sections of population not working but falsely claiming state handouts, the ignorant immigrant is not convinced that these conducts and

values are at all desirable. Although many of these conducts have criminal sanctions, only a small numbers of perpetrators get caught, and even a smaller number get successfully prosecuted. Also if a homeowner tackles a burglar, it is the homeowner rather than the burglar who is likely to be charged by the police for assault. So the new immigrant is totally confused.

We can also look at some other values traditionally claimed to be British and desirable.

First, 'honesty'. When I arrived in England as a student more than 30 years back, I could leave my suitcase on the roadside and look for a hotel room or lodging, and collect the luggage long afterward with complete assurance that it would not be disturbed. Also front doors of many homes then were not required to be locked even at night. This certainly was (note the past tense) a 'British value' to be proud of. But such honesty ceased to exist a long ago!

We can then look at 'politeness, courtesy and manners'.

We can then talk of 'family values'. This area is quite tricky, because Mafia style blind loyalty to extended family ties invariably leads to nepotism, corruption and other unethical and illegal activities, undermining the society. So in Britain the ideal model was the nuclear family with father, mother and a few children to be reared in parental love and care till the establishment of the next generation nuclear family. Marriage and fidelity were the bases of this family life, which are being eroded in value day by day. Breakdown of the marriages in the British royal family and amongst celebrities are glaring examples of this erosion.
Shafi Ahmed
100, Western Avenue
London, UK

Attention: Aktel

I have been a user of Aktel mobile phone's post-paid service for the last four years. I bought the SIM card for an exorbitant price.

Recently, the leading cell phone companies reduced call rates and added many other facilities. For example, GrameenPhone opened the BTB incoming facility for the customers who used to have only Mobile to Mobile post paid connection facility.

My phone has only one-way BTB facility and that is the incoming one. I would like to request the Aktel authorities to open the BTB outgoing facility by keeping the line rent as it is. From the marketing perspective, I strongly believe it will increase their sale dramatically.
Badal Hasib
One-mail

Serving people

I was deployed in one of the districts close to my unit location to assist the civil authorities in distributing VGF cards. I would not like to elaborate my experience here, but it was one of the greatest learning experiences of my life, to say the least. I personally had to go from door to door to verify the authenticity of the VGF card distribution list, which we did quite satisfactorily. I felt a sense of achievement serving my fellow countrymen who suffer day in and day out, who go to bed unfed, who even don't have a shelter to sleep under. The accomplishment was euphoric and the most productive job I ever did in my last nine years of service in the Army. The point I would like to highlight is that the government could use us -- a well-disciplined and revered force -- to do more of such jobs from road construction to ensuring internal security, from feeding the poor to educating those in need.

My suggestion would be to deploy the Army personnel for three months every year in various locations of the country for a variety of employment, besides the present system of deploying them only when there is a crisis. The countrymen pay us and we would like to give something in return too.
A VGF card distributor
Dhaka

Well done magistrates!

Our magistrates are not supposed to sit in the cosy chairs within four walls of their office room and simply pass the verdicts. Rather, they have by this time proved that they can act well, as civil army also. And that, too, with character and courage, fortitude and determination. They did not cherish to distinguish between the big business magnet and an ordinary grocery shop owner while conducting the anti adulteration drive. They are following the motto "National interest atop, and Law is blind."

There is no instance of their surrendering to the greed for wealth or bowing down to any pressure, till now. The nation feels proud of them, and wants continuity of their job with the same quality and spirit.

At the same time, it may be mentioned here that it is not easy to go ahead smoothly with that spirit, given the context of Bangladesh. There might be pressure from behind the screen and political interference.

Once again we should say Bravo Magistrates! May your courage and patriotism get due recognition.
SA Hussain
Mirpur, Dhaka

Bomb blasts

It's a matter of great courage to publish a news item claiming the involvement of a former army personnel in the series of bomb blasts. The Daily Star has again lived up to its mission statement: Journalism without fear or favour.

Right after the news was published, there was reaction from the army itself. The army simply denied the incident, which was very natural. They blamed the media for publishing such news. None of them actually asked for a thorough investigation.

What surprised me most is the news carried by a Bengalee daily that the allegation was baseless.
Mohammad Twaha
One-mail

Talent hunt

I support cadet Elias for his opinion on the talent hunt programme. Three private television channels recently launched three different talent hunt programmes. Among them Close Up 1



Maradona meets Karpov

It's nice to notice that football legend Diego Maradona has been hosting a unique programme on the Argentine TV. A more interesting & historic event was that he recently met former world champion of chess Anatoly Karpov of Russia. They played a game of chess together and the result was a draw!

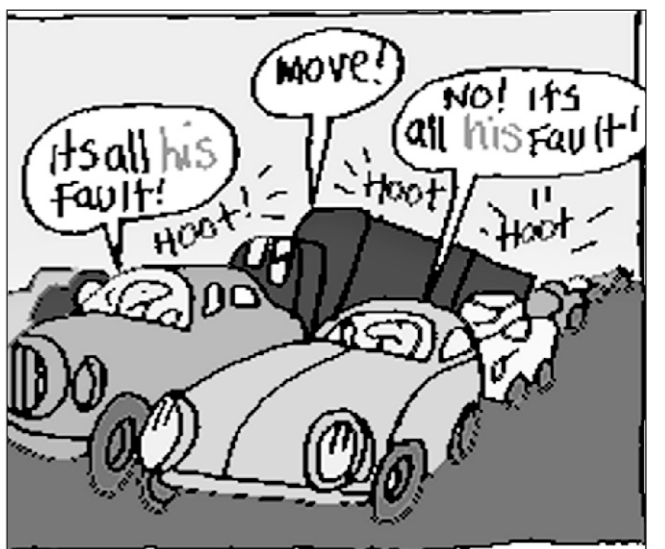
Later after the game Karpov presented a wooden chess set to the football magician Maradona with autograph and Maradona gave him an autographed football in return. This wonderful gesture of friendship was indeed unique. In the past, there was another historical encounter between the two living legends of football on earth Maradona & Pele.
Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

is really different and doing well. We have only three private TV channels in Bangladesh. They have international standard and a lot of viewers. But there are some people in our country who don't like to watch our TV channels but they have no problem watching Indian TV channels. This is happening because they don't love Bangladesh and its culture. They just live in this country but they want to sing in Hindi, listen to Hindi songs and watch Hindi TV channels.

I want to repeat cadet Elias's words "Let's love our country and give good response to the good things produced here. We have to have confidence in our ability."
Mostofa Saikh Chowdhury
Tezturi Bazar, Dhaka

A good article
I enjoyed the article "Imaginary conversation between Bush and Condoleezza Rice on Bangladesh."
It is fantastic and soaked with rhetoric by which he barely spares any effort to bolster his previous two articles.
The writer without doubt deserves thanks for his patriotism.
Roney, One-mail

Scholastica and traffic jam



I'm writing about the severe problem that the busy people in the city are suffering from. The problem is traffic congestion created every day in front of the city's most prestigious English medium school, 'Scholastica'. The jam begins at 1:30pm and continues till 3:30pm due to the illegally parked cars which cover almost two thirds of the highway and create a deadlock from the Airport to Uttara, causing wastage of a lot of valuable time of the commuters. It happens because the school does not have any parking lot.

I would like to ask the city's traffic authorities whether this is fair. If it is not acceptable, why don't they take an initiative to eliminate it?
Anis Rahman, University of Dhaka



AIDS prevention and control

It's a matter of great concern that our neighbouring countries-- India, Myanmar and Nepal-- are considered to be the focal point of HIV epidemic in this region. Currently, about five million people in India are infected with HIV.

The epidemic of HIV/AIDS in India is following the same pattern of Africa and it could become devastating unless preventive action is taken now. It is an expert assumption that the

number of people infected with HIV in India will rise to 15-20 million by 2010.

Bangladesh has a porous border with India and Myanmar.

We have a large number of migrants working in the Middle Eastern countries as maidservants, truck drivers, businessmen and labourers. These migrants, who spend many months away from their families, are known to be at an increased risk of contracting HIV.

So, from my experience I believe the HIV situation of Bangladesh, Nepal,

India, Pakistan, Myanmar & Afghanistan needs better handling under a well-coordinated programme supervised by an organisation like Saarc, or any other international agency.

The governments of these countries should come forward to support such a programme.
Md. Alauddin,
Mirpur-10, Dhaka