

letters@thedailystar.net

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Day of Independence, but...

I was not born 230 years ago & therefore I do not know the America of 1776. But I know today's America, the way I see it.

Today a handful of Americans, who rule that country directly & indirectly, by using & manipulating cleverly chosen words like freedom, tolerance, justice, values & democracy have shrewdly legalise all kinds of horrible sins & encouraged their people to remain consumed in it so that the ability of common people to distinguish between good & evil is lost. The art of lying, deception, manipulation of words & sentences is taught right in their college classrooms. They can very convincingly make an innocent person or a nation look bad (i.e. unworthy, criminal & terrorist etc). They say one thing with their mouth and mean something different in their heart. Justice is one-way traffic, you will be judged & punished by them, but you cannot seek justice from them. No one can try the American soldiers for the genocide they have committed & are committing. They are above the law. Justice has one meaning when it comes to Israel and a different meaning when it comes to Palestinians & Muslims. They cry democracy whenever or however it suits them. They even label their own people as unpatriotic when their own actions are questioned. They cry secular, but when it comes to Palestinian-Israeli conflict, they use their distorted version of religion to commit genocide on Palestinians. They have legalised stealing of wealth from other

nations and have become rich themselves and in turn you have to hear lecture from them on how poor & unworthy you are. They forcibly want to establish American values of nudity, wine, and corruption on other nations. If you react to this you are either an extremist or a terrorist.

When hungry pilgrims came to America the natives gave them food & shelter. The natives in turn were driven away from their land, something similar that the Zionists are doing to the Palestinians today. And it is not by mistake that America heavily supports the Zionists, it runs in their blood. Even though America earned its freedom from Britain, but to me 4th of July symbolises the wrong committed to the natives.

They give billions of dollars in aid to other nations, but not without a string attached to it. You have to pay a heavy price for it as a nation or as an individual. They say "In God We Trust", but they mean "In Money We Trust". Whatever their good deeds are, they are heavily overshadowed by the brutal & double standard policies.

George W. Bush has become the number one threat to world peace & stability. It is almost impossible that in future we will see a peaceful & stable world.

America has wronged so many individuals & nations. Fourth of July is a reminder that more brutal days are ahead.

Syed Husain
Old DOHS, Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka

1st July was the 151st anniversary of the "Santal hool" (rebellion), against the British rulers and local landlords. Thousands of people, mostly the Santal farmers, sacrificed their lives during this great rebellion of 1855-57. Their demands like constitutional recognition, right to ancestral land, primary education in their mother language, protection of their culture for which they revolted need to be recognised. If we go through the Indian constitution, we will find that it recognises the tribals' existence. It also promises to protect their culture. But shockingly enough, our constitution remains silent on this issue. Another important fact is traditional land right of indigenous people for which they fought against the British rulers. So the existing laws need to be reviewed.

Bangladesh is a pluralistic society. So our constitution should recognise this aspect of our existence.

Rashedul Khokon
On e-mail



PHOTO: AFP

as heritage site

As a resident of Shankhari Bazar, I wholeheartedly congratulate the authorities for taking the initiative to declare Shankhari Bazar as a historical heritage.

It's really a place which can entertain lots of tourists from abroad as well as home. The old buildings of this area are artistically very rich but they need proper care and preservation from both the government and local people. Most of the buildings are hazardous as they are more than hundred years old. Since all buildings are attached to one another, they are still standing. But they may fall anytime (God save them.).

It should not end in a declaration only; the endeavour must start just now, not now but from today. Experts ought to be engaged to make the local people aware of the importance of the traditional buildings. Old Dhaka is a traditional place and Shankhari Bazar is one of the most traditional sites of it. Besides, the authorities should train some efficient locals to work as guides to the tourists and Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation must take immediate steps to implement this. Not only this, the print & visual media can play a better role printing & telecasting reports on it on a regular basis.

I congratulate The Daily Star for reporting on it several times.

Mrinal Sarkar
Lecturer
College of Development Alternative (CODA)
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Sound pollution

Sound is measured by the decibel. Speech sound runs 65 to 75 decibels. Heavy traffic generates 90 decibels. By 120 decibels, sound becomes painful to the ears. More than 20 million people have been victimised to on going tremendous sound pollution every year in the world. Extreme sound pollution, made by vehicles including buses, trucks, cabs etc, destroys the delicate cells in the ears. Sound pollution in Dhaka city is going upward. It is mentionable that most of the

students and children have been affected by sound pollution. The future generation should be saved from this menace. The traffic police should take the necessary steps to check sound pollution.

Mohammad Zaman
On e-mail

Jamaat's game plan

The Awami League (AL) vs. the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) well, that is the conventional paradigm. But these two presumably dominant political juggernauts are none but the opposing sides of the same face, albeit scarred and ugly. One can see no great difference between the present and the immediate past prime minister. They essentially are two ladies, who capitalised on their family-misfortune to smoothen their silk road to power.

And yet the country is divided. And a new paradigm, after years of shrewd cultivation, has emerged. And it is Secular vs Non-secular Extreme Right. And this paradigm is such that the very essence of democracy is now in a crucible. The BNP, for understandable reasons, forged an unholy alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami. In the process they lent a sense of immense legitimacy to a party that fought against the very inception and aspiration of our nation. It shall not be a hard-headed concoction to imagine that the Jamaat shall use the democratic principle to get to the top, only to throw it away as used tissue paper as they reach their "Manzil".

It is sad to see that the young BNP leaders, with no sense of history or of ideology, are mingling happily with a group of extreme right wing idealists of the Jamaat.

Mohammad Zaman
On e-mail

Iraqi prisoners and a little girl

Imagine the next disturbing picture on the TV news: a malnourished Iraqi Muslim prisoner, carrying a stone, one-third of his own weight, has to stand next to a table of American and British soldiers, who

are eating and feasting. The hungry, badly dressed and tired Iraqi prisoner is not allowed to sit, to eat or drink, or to put the stone down on the floor. He can only watch the foreign soldiers eating the lavish dishes. What would be the reaction of the Muslim world? Correct, the reaction would be anger.

So, the other day, in Motel Shaibal in Cox's Bazar, I took my breakfast, accompanied by a foreign guest. In front of our table, a nice, unmistakably rich and educated Bangladeshi Muslim family of at least one dozen members, was eating their breakfast. Suddenly, my guest stopped eating, and pointed at a small girl, most simply dressed, maybe eight years old, carrying a well fed baby. The girl, clearly the "maid servant" of the family, was not allowed to sit down, was not allowed to eat or drink, and had to carry the heavy, obese baby around the table

meanwhile the members of the family were eating their delicious breakfast. The girl looked very tired and hungry, but nobody of the family even looked at her or cared about her. She simply did not exist for the family.

My guest, for the first time in Bangladesh, was disgusted and refused to continue his breakfast. I knew that it could harm the girl, if I would make a remark to the family about their behaviour. The girl could be blamed for it.

However, by keeping mum, I would agree with the inhuman treatment of the child. Therefore I stopped the eldest son of the family, when he passed our table on his way to the bathroom, after he finished his breakfast. I introduced myself, and told him, very politely, that as a foreigner I did not understand the reason why the little girl was not allowed to sit and to eat.

The reaction of the young man was astonishing. He told me: "there is no place!" We were the only guests in the restaurant and I counted more than 100 empty chairs. I told the young man that the girl was allowed to sit at our table. The young man, shamefully, went to the girl, took the baby, and put another chair on the family table.

The "maid servant" was allowed to sit down and got some food.

As a foreigner, I do not understand the reason why many (educated) people in Bangladesh, so clearly, openly and without any embarrassment, preserve the use of children as "private slaves" in their households. Because without any doubts, slaves they are!

As mentioned above, in case of the abuse of the Iraqi prisoner, the world community, including the Muslims, would be correctly shocked and angry. However, the case of the small malnourished Muslim girl is considered as normal, an "everyday affair", something we witness in most of the households we visit in Bangladesh.

However the use of slaves, or the use of children as private property is absolutely not normal. It is the same human rights abuse as the abuse of the Iraqi prisoner.

We, the adults, are responsible when the rights of these children are violated.

Willy Legendre
Cox's Bazar

Rootless kids set up bank

Child workers of Bangladesh who are often termed 'rootless' have established a saving project of their own, after all the banks turned them away.

Unloading goods from his head, Adu, a porter boy working in downtown Dhaka, asked the owner of a shop to pay the money quickly, saying he had to go to his bank. Getting a 10 taka note (one US dollar equals around 70 taka), Adu started running towards his 'bank' near his working place.

The shop owner followed him out of his curiosity. On reaching the fourth floor of a building, he saw several boys and girls like Adu lined up with a small book in hand.

A girl, Sumi, was taking the money at a counter. She worked as a manager. In a neighbouring room, some young boys and girls were holding a meeting. They were, in reality, accepting deposits and distributing money.

These so-called 'rootless' chil-

dren are, in reality, running a saving project called the Children Development Bank.

A few boys and girls aged 15-17 first dreamt of the saving project. Almost all of them lost their parents early and they came to the capital in search of some means of survival.

These children, who work as porters in different vegetable markets, sleep in railway stations, bus stops and ferry terminals after toiling the whole day. And most of them manage to save a portion of their small earnings every day.

A country that pioneered the idea of micro-credit, an idea being imported by many other countries of the world, Bangladesh has not developed any banking system for the likes of these poor children. They have no access to the existing banking system of the country either.

The kids had to keep their savings with them and as they slept in the open, thieves, drug addicts and even policemen used to forcibly take away their money. This prompted them to find alternatives.

The fund, however, has no banking character. This bank only keeps the children's money and returns it whenever needed.

Sumi and Akhter now act as top officials of the bank. Every six months, the management changes through a democratic process.

This fund has 11 branches now. Of them, 10 are in Dhaka and one is in Chittagong. The number of depositors is around 1,400. Their total savings stand at about one million taka.

Zaki Rahman
On e-mail

Canadian visa

I was not surprised when I read the letter on "Anika's right to treatment in Canada". I faced bitter and unexpected situations each time I had to go to the Canadian High Commission (CHC), Dhaka.

I found most of the visa officers uncooperative.

Dr. Ashkur Bhuiya, P.Eng.
Calgary, Alberta

The tempest

The government administration has broken down, judging as a reader of newspapers.

There are too many daily operations & many problems which are impossible for 60 ministers to handle.

Kansat has generated a few political tempests.

The alliance of like-minded Islamic (religious) political parties is breaking up. One (new by-named) is joining the opposition-14 for leverage.

The Jamaat is in a fix sitting on the fence. The oppression, defiance, and indiscipline in the student fronts of political parties are dangerous for the future of the country. If you don't listen to anybody, who will listen to you?

Political groups, business & professional bodies, all are threatening "Greater movements". The transport sector is crippled. No law & order in academic arena.

Bangladesh is passing through a political tsunami; the very future of political governance is at stake. The responsibility is 100% on the political leaders & players.

You can't get something for nothing. The electorate is in a hot mood. Vested foreign forces are watching with glee.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

New generation

I am writing to let you know that I completely agree with the letter written to you by Md. Anwarul Kabir, Assistant Professor & Research Coordinator, on "AL politics and the new generation". Again, as the professor said, I would like to emphasise the fact I am not inclined to promote any particular political party and don't have any intention as such. In addition to what professor Kabir has already stated, being a concerned citizen and someone from the upcoming generation, I feel the urge to express my apprehension about the system of our country. Like many other young people, I wonder if the nation's future holds anything positive. However, at the same time I admit that it is very easy to point out the wrongdoings, and criticise the politicians and the corruption in the system which has already de-shaped Bangladesh's image before the world. But what the generation that is empowered with governance and authority is missing surprisingly is the significance of the forthcoming generation. Despite the cliché that is often uttered by our eminent politicians - "Children are the future", their activities don't reflect their words. Most politicians in our country bear a preconceived notion of reigning forever. As if they are immortal and have no space for anyone else.

What amazes me is that the world's largest democracy, India, which also happens to be the nation demographically existing right next to us, is expecting a socio-political revolution through the enrolment of a significant number of young, educated and innovative politicians.

I throw a question to my young fellows- How many of us are mentally prepared or interested to take the lead and overcome the challenges that we are already confronting and the ones yet to be faced?

Concerned young!

Triporna Das
Ohio, U.S.A

Shankhari Bazar

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PHOTO: AFP

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PHOTO: AFP

If our neighbouring nation can bring about such social and political reforms by welcoming the new generation in major decision-making about the country's infrastructure, then why can't Bangladesh anticipate something of that sort? What we, the youngsters, are learning from our politicians is animosity with each other. We are sick and tired of this persisting unhealthy practice of politics by some people who don't deserve to be MPs or ministers. It's a dire shame for us as the young people are receiving the misinterpreted knowledge of politics and governance when applied to the real world.

The foremost thing that these politicians keep in their mind is power rather than people to who they are accountable. Our democracy is in desperate need of consolidation. Today, standing at a crucial phase of the country's democracy it is very difficult to aspire to achieve a consolidation.

Its now totally in the hand of the forthcoming generation of Bangladesh and how they deal with such a fragile democracy.

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PHOTO: AFP

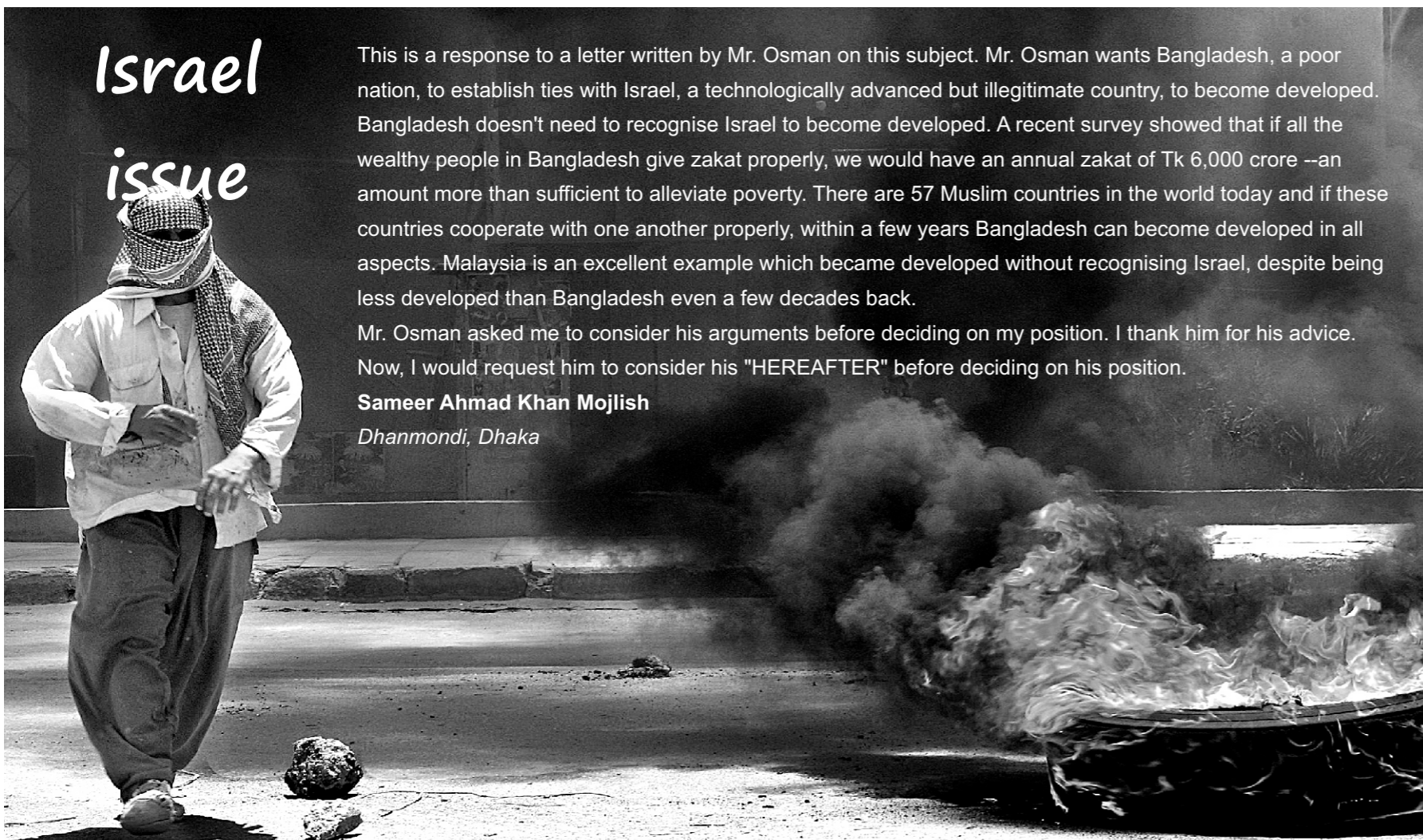


PHOTO: AFP

Hasina's trip: Unnecessary brickbats

I would like to take issue with Mr. Imam's article entitled "Hasina's trip: Unnecessary brickbats" published on July 4. He has claimed that as a former prime minister and opposition leader it was but expected that Sheikh Hasina would be meeting such Indian dignitaries

I was wondering how many countries did Sheikh Hasina visit in the last couple of years and which of those countries treated her like the Indian government did? Did Sheikh Hasina meet President Bush and Hillary Clinton (or Howard Dean or Senate Majority leader Senator Reed whoever you deem Democratic party leader in the USA)? Did the US Air force carry Hasina from east coast to west coast? The answer is an emphatic NO. By the way, the comment that all this shows the importance of Bangladesh to India is almost laughable.

After that he tried to show how the Indian government formed a working relationship with the Awami League and the Ganges Water Treaty and Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord are the results of that good relation. I do not have to remind him that this year we have got the lowest level of water after the treaty was signed. As far as the accord goes, I would request you to answer this. Who was responsible for aiding, arming and sheltering of Shantibahini which killed hundreds of Bangladeshi citizens and was a threat to Bangladeshi sovereignty? So think before expressing too much gratitude for nothing really.

The thing, which surprises me, is this. Even educated people think that Bangladesh's interest is best served siding with India. Trade imbalance worth billions of dollars, Farakka Dam, killing of Bangladeshi nationals on the border etc do not deter them from acting as an apologist for India.

Hasan Mir, Rochester, Minnesota



PHOTO: AFP