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# Amar Ekushey and the hoax

Every year 21 February is observed to commemorate those who sacrificed their valuable lives in 1952 so that our people could use Bangla as the official language. Their sacrifices paved the way to the ultimate liberation of Bangladesh from the clutches of the Pakistani rulers. It is expected that our national language will be honoured and respected in all walks of life. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Last year I was in a department store in Uttara (Dhaka). When I was checking out at the cash, the lady, a Bangladeshi, spoke to me in English. When I requested her to speak in Bangla, she arrogantly reminded me that it was the policy of the store to use English as the language of communication. I was shocked by her reply and reminded her that Bangla was the national language of Bangladesh. My appeal had little impact on her. Later, I noticed that in several stores in Dhaka, the use of English has become a standard practice. This step motherly attitude towards Bangla is indeed shocking.

I remember very well when one of my relatives who was a teacher at Dhaka University in the 1960s was about to lose his job as he was teaching a science subject in Bangla. People have made tremendous sacrifices to earn the right to use Bangla. Unfortunately, it appears that nowadays these sacrifices have been almost forgotten. This is also noticeable in many Bangla newspapers where journalists are using English words when equivalent Bangla words are available. Bangla is a very rich language and that has to be acknowledged.

The widespread use of English is also taking place in some of our foreign missions. Some embassies offer forms in English, deliberately

ignoring the use of Bangla. It is worthwhile to point out that in some countries of the continental Europe, there are several Bangladeshis who only know Bangla and the language of the country where they reside. Nowadays, citizens of the most European countries know English quite well. But they use their own national language.

It is time we learned to respect Bangla in the truest sense of the term, rather than paying only a lip service to it.

**Ratan Sarkar**  
*On e-mail*

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Amar Ekushey & the International Mother Language Day have been observed with all warmth and enthusiasm across the country and beyond. People from all walks of life have thronged the Shaheed Minars in the country with a solemn and warm reverence to pay tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives on this very day in 1952 and thus enabled the Bengali people speak out in their own language. We had our language freed from the cruel imposition by then government that was alien to our tongue. We got the freedom to speak in our collective spirit; we had furthered our cause for a complete freedom from any power ruling us that culminated in the glorious liberation war and the subsequent triumph in 1971. Millions of martyrs, known and unknown paved the way to liberation.

Now let us uphold the spirit of Amar Ekushey, let us uphold the essence of our being a free and proud nation.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
*Agrabad, Chittagong*

# To Sheikh Hasina...

I want to send a message to AL president Sheikh Hasina to ask her how did she know that people wouldn't accept extra-constitutional government. All of us know very well that common people want to see this interim government forever, only because the people know very well about the politicians. Unfortunately, we general people are the victims of this dirty politics.

**Parvin Salina, On e-mail**

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Sheikh Hasina raised a number of serious issues related to politics in Bangladesh and gave an elaborate account of the political and personal backgrounds of a number of her close and distant family members and relatives. It deserves high appreciation from all that a former prime minister of Bangladesh showed the courage to write openly about the wealth of her own and extended family members since 1950. This is an opportunity for others to follow suit.

**Md. Iqbal Miah**  
*An Expatriate Bangladeshi from Ethiopia*



## Ray of hope

Bangladesh and its caretaker government deserve praise for bold actions against the corrupt.

For years, the political arena in Bangladesh was more like a theatre hall that featured villains killing the good guys, taking control over all their material possessions. Like zombies, we got used to seeing such dramas played over and over again. The nasty party politics in Bangladesh did not allow the good guys to feel wanted or desired; they chose to either live unnoticed as second and third class citizens or leave the country to maintain their sanity. But someone had to fill the vacuum in politics. Thus came those with either muscle or money.

The more corrupt the system became, the more it attracted people with muscle and money to seal the process. With power and no accountability for their actions, they became more powerful and dangerous. Dangerous enough to kill, grab and torture; greedy and corrupt enough to consider everything as their own. It was no wonder that soon Bangladesh sealed its fate as the most corrupt nation where almost anything could be done with the right kind of influence or money.

However, as the present turn of events in Bangladesh would dictate, miracles do happen, even when people least expect it. Some of the feared godfathers have already been arrested. More are waiting in line. Two years ago my family property in Chittagong was illegally grabbed by a front man of one such powerful character who had broken into our Khulshi compound with hundreds of terrorists. I was told by everyone that even the PM had no power over him. PM's officials behaved as if they would be burnt alive if they were to produce my complaint before her. A Divisional Commissioner advised me to negotiate directly with our nemesis.

All my letters to the then government ministers and IG remained unanswered. No one had the guts to do anything against this monster and his front man.

My only wish is that the CTG create a blueprint of measures that would discourage corrupt and evil people to ever toy with the destiny of Bangladesh. I am sure people are willing to give the CTG enough time to make that happen. They are not so thrilled about an early election or who comes to power next, but are genuinely concerned about matters that directly affect them - their life, security and peace.

The CTG of Dr. Fakhruddin must be lauded for going after the most corrupt section of the society, i.e. land grabbers, loan defaulters, thugs and murderers, etc. It must, however, be extra cautious as it leads our nation into a new path. Those who are genuinely

inly corrupt and have soiled their hands with crimes need to do the time in prison. But those who are innocent ought to be released and treated fairly.

While election is a necessary process through which people are given the privilege to elect candidates, we have seen that it is not always the best option people have when the system is so flawed that it only allows the corrupt and evil to surface. Probably, Bangladesh needs to prepare its soil by uprooting weeds before planting the seed of democracy (through a fair election, no matter how excited citizens may feel about their right to vote). After all, no one would feel secure if the criminals come back to power.

Those of us who are closely monitoring Bangladesh from abroad cannot but be thrilled with excitement and be hopeful of the much-needed positive change. We wish Dr. Fakhruddin and his government all success.

**Dr. Habib Siddiqui**  
*On e-mail*

## Name of a martyr

From all the historical evidences that I studied I see that a young man named Shaafiur Rahman was killed on Feb 22, 1952. And no one by the name Shafiq ever died at that time.

However, I find many newspapers, TV commentaries and even a name written on flower in front of the Shaheed Minar referring to Shafiq. Professionalism requires accuracy in reporting.

**Ahsan Habib**  
*Professor of Economics*  
*Adrian College, Adrian*  
*Michigan, U.S.A.*

## Dhaka Marathon?

I think Dhaka needs a permanent yearly organised marathon like that of London and NY. This would put Dhaka on the world marathon map and help to enthuse and train future Bangladeshi athletes and raise the profiles of charities.

Although not a runner myself, last year I ran the London Marathon as a personal challenge just to see if I could do it and found the experience exhilarating. They say running marathon is one of the most amazing things one could do in a lifetime and I couldn't agree more.

My time wasn't great but being a thirty-year old male smoker (couldn't give up during training even!) I managed to do it in 3:58:22 a sub-4 hour first marathon is not bad for a novice. I also raised two thousand and five hundred pounds for Marie Curie Cancer Care (Hampstead, London) in memory of my late mother.

The four month training was tough but I learnt so much about the body, nutrition and the positive benefits of regular exercise. You

won't be surprised to learn that inevitably I started thinking about setting up a marathon in Dhaka. I don't know why but I think I want to give something to my motherland.

For over a year now, I have given this great idea a good deal of thought and looked seriously at the practicality of setting it up. I have taken the first step and registered www.Dhakamarathon.com domain name. The next step would be to set up and register a not-for-profit charity with a Dhaka based board to make this a reality. I look to DS readers for suggestions and participation. All profits would go to Bangladeshi charities after expenses. The runners would also raise money for charities.

We need to get a big sponsor like a bank or a big consumer brand in Bangladesh to sponsor the event and three media partners: I suggest your newspaper; another mass market mainstream Bengali newspaper and state TV to show the event live on TV. Overall, Bangladeshi charities would benefit and it could become a national event. We would also need to get Bangladeshi national sports, TV, film, musical, literary and political personalities involved to give this the required unity of purpose and exposure in the media and elsewhere to make it a success.

Please contact me via email with your thoughts, advice and suggestions. Let me know if you would like to come onboard to ma'y is it that when one party loses an election they have the audacity to claim that they represent the "people" of Bangladesh? I hate to state the obvious. If you're in opposition, then you cannot speak for the "people" because the majority voted against you. If you're preparing for an election, then "people" don't want something because you're not in power.

Bangladeshis love to talk for the rest of us. It is high time that "we" make an effort to stop talking as though our words represent the "people" of Bangladesh. If one were to seek the definition of the phrase "Too many Caesars, not enough soldiers" the answer should be "Bangladeshis".

**Abdul M. Ismail**  
*On e-mail*

## An appeal

Ever since the caretaker government came to power there is a competition going on among a group of newspapers to malign everyone associated with the immediate past govt, as if there was no corruption before the BNP-led opposition came to power. So far the caretaker govt has done a splendid job by trying to be judicious in terms of arresting the corrupt people. But the way a section of the print media has started publishing stories, it

might even make the most neutral attempt myopic. Very interestingly, their stories go around the last five years. Nothing is said about how the BNP did a relatively clean job during their first tenure or how the AL got involved in mindless corruption right throughout their stint in the govt.

The press should rise above petty party politics.

**Manna Chowdhury**  
*On e-mail*

## Go ahead, Dr. Yunus

While your consigning "Poverty to the Museum by 2030" is a commendable goal, sending the AL, BNP, JS and other crooked, corrupt political parties in Bangladesh to the "museum" in 2007/2008 would be just as desirable and achievable. We, the frustrated citizens of this country, are behind you in your mission and ready to help. Articulate your manifesto and execute your plans, lead the way, bring a sea-change in Bangladeshi politics away from the dirt, corruption, money and muscle that have characterized all elections to date. The good people of this country will rally around you to make the dreams of a generation a reality in their lifetime.

**Ali Shevket**  
*California, USA*

## Ekushey at Birmingham University

The International Mother Language Day was celebrated at International Development Department of Birmingham University, UK, on 21 February with due respect and enthusiasm. The Bangladeshi students studying here organised this occasion for the first time. The main programme started at 6.00pm at Squash Lecture Hall of the department with a brief power-point presentation depicting the history of the Language Movement, the supreme sacrifices of Salam, Rafiq, Barkat and other valiant sons of the soil, how Amar Ekushey became the International Mother Language Day and finally how this very day has become the symbol of protest against tyranny, injustice on the one hand, and the epitome of creativity on the other. The legendary song 'Amar bhaier rokte rangano Ekushey February' was sung by the Bangladeshi students

studying in Public Economic Management & Finance (PEMF) and MBA. Shamsun Nahar and Yasmin rendered solo songs. Students from about 20 countries attended the function. Demola from Nigeria, Zahir from Pakistan, Sangeeta and Hirmeet Singh from India, Shining from China and others rendered songs in their mother languages. Mr. T. R. Chanda, a Bangladeshi now living in Birmingham, reminisced on those tumultuous days of 1952 when he was a student of class IX at a school in Sylhet. There was pin-drop silence and everyone listened to the events with rapt attention.

The function ended with the well-known song 'We shall overcome' sung both in English and other languages by the students. The whole programme was coordinated and presented by Mr. Pranab, student representative and coordinator of the programme. The Birmingham University authorities extended all support to it.

**Shampad Barua**  
*Birmingham University*

## Commuters in trouble

As a citizen of Bangladesh I am very happy to see the actions and activities of the present caretaker government. And people are also very pleased like me. However, I have a small request to the communications adviser about the bus service in Dhaka city. In the last two years, the transportation sector added various town services. And they collect fares from people without any rules and regulations. Though they reduce the transportation problem, they take extra fares in violation of rules (if there were any). Not only that some services haven't enough buses. So people have to face all sorts of problems.

I would request the adviser in charge of communications to kindly look into the matter as we, the commuters, are facing lots of problems every day.

**Pulak**  
*Kalabagan, Dhaka*

# Amartya Sen's philosophy

This is in response to Professor Zahidul Haque's letter (19 February 2007).

Prof. Haque rightly condemns a shameful incident reported to have taken place in India. But, why does he draw a link between Prof. Sen and the incident, just because the incident took place in India? I am confused as to the specific point or allegation being made. Has Prof. Sen ever denied that there is intolerance in India, or has he ever supported crimes such as those reported? Prof. Haque then, by similarity, has to take responsibility for every bad incident in Bangladesh, or is he rather implying that no condemnable events take place in his own country?

On the subject of intolerance, perhaps Prof. Haque may wish to ask himself why, Prof. Sen, whose ancestral home was in Wari (Dhaka), and his family felt compelled to leave the land of their forefathers and seek refuge in another?

**Subhash Ghosh, On e-mail**

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I find the letter on Professor Amartya Sen unworthy and out of context. Prof. Sen is much above the narrow boundaries of religion and nationality. He finds time to visit the country of his ancestral home quite often and shares his thoughts. He donated part of his Nobel Prize money to a trust fund in Bangladesh.

It is not desirable to compare any evil event here with similar events in India to feel good that it happens in India too. It is time we rise above and look for good examples.

**Munim Chowdhury, On e-mail**



This is a good time for Bangladeshis who want to see changes in the country. When I say Bangladeshis, I mean the common people like "rest of us" who work 9-5, pull rickshaws, farm lands, carry bricks. I mean the little kids who sell flowers at that traffic light, who go to school to get education and the people who struggle to make ends meet. For all of us, this is the time to make a

change to the way our country is run. The 'untouchable' hooligans are on the run! I was back in Bangladesh last November and was disheartened to see the state of things there. There were power outages every day, people couldn't go to work, public roads where political workstations and stuck in between were the commoners -- us. The leaders needed to just declare "hartal" and

# Look forward!

so it was the next day and the day after, and so on.

A friend of mine in Dhaka was almost boasting of all the new malls and the great eating places and how life has changed for the better. But the reality is progress can't be measured by high-rise buildings, eateries, shopping malls and fancy cars cruising the streets of Dhaka when people live in slums. In fact, they are a strong sign of widening wealth differences between the poor and the rich. What I saw was more people struggling to find the basics: food, clothing, shelter, education and medicine. The condition is bad in Dhaka and it is no better in the villages.

The core message is: the plundering by a few must stop. And it must stop now.

The time for meetings, fist-thumping political speeches is over. It's time for action and accountability.

I support Dr. Yunus even if I don't support his ideology. Bottom line: Will he help our people? At least he won't hoard money.

We need an educated leader. We need a visionary leader who has the capacity to catapult the country out of this misery; someone who has sympathy and respect for his/her fellow countrymen and the finesse to motivate his followers to lead by example. I say, if the poor can get out of the rut of poverty they are in and if the common people can live a better life, then let the caretaker government stay for a few years if that's what it takes.

We want our leader to see the fact that the country needs better infrastructure (not malls but better roads, hospitals, schools, mass-communication systems etc), more social services for the people in the villages and a gateway for poor people in the city to earn a living. Set up government assisted

technical schools to teach skills that are transferable to jobs (i.e. auto mechanic, machinery worker, PC technician, auto driver, wood workers etc). Show unflinching support to new entrepreneurs who want to bring the world to Bangladesh. Create that environment so that they can do so. Allow the courts to function independently and promote expeditious disposition of cases. Provide ample funding for the police and ensure that all trainees are hired and trained with emphasis on high moral character. Important to note is the fact that they must be compensated appropriately.

Hope we never go back to the dark era and that it stays in the history books as a grave reminder for all of us (especially politicians) of the civic and moral duty towards each other and our country.

**Khaled Ejaz, San Jose, CA, USA**