



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.

Proliferation of guns in US

The United States must be the only country in the world where children have easy access to guns and where an already identified demented person can easily buy a handgun. To understand the havoc caused by the anarchic proliferation of guns in America, a look at Texas will be in order.

When 14-year-old Juan Ramon, of Halthom City near Fort Worth, got angry after a family row, he didn't kick the family dog or sulk, with a family rifle (a Christmas gift from his father) ready at hand, he started shooting. He shot a dog and seriously injured three neighbours, before killing a cop who had answered an emergency call. Later, Juan was killed in a hail of police bullets.

Juan Ramon's weekend shooting spree was quickly followed by several other shooting deaths in the state -- all within weeks of the Feb. 28, 1993 shootout at the Branch Davidian sect's compound near Waco. In the Lone Star state, the national capital of gun culture, such stark tragedies are nothing unusual. Texas has a popu-

lation of about 17 million. Between them, they own 86 million guns -- or four guns for every man, woman and child. Texas has no gun registration laws and guns can be easily purchased everywhere in the state. Not surprisingly, thousands are being cut down by gunfire every year in Texas.

Recalling also the 1991 massacre at Luby's Restaurant in nearby Killeen where a deranged man armed with an assault rifle shot dead 22 people, the paper wrote: "These high-profile slaughters are sickening. But are they really any more so than the slow-motion mayhem going on in virtually every city?"

"A steady drumbeat of violence plays itself out daily, felling our fellow citizens one by one... But society seems to cruise along, largely oblivious to the depth of the problem, until one of these mega-events occurs and then society goes ballistic."

While these observations are largely accurate, society going "ballistic" for gun control may be a pious wish.



For most Texans, these bloody shootouts are essentially freak shows -- something scary happening to somebody else. Somehow they fail to relate events like Killeen and Waco directly to their own lives and habits, any more than they do the routine bloodshed on the streets of Dallas and Houston. Perhaps this is because they don't understand or don't care. But perhaps the deeper truth is that given the enormous pressure exerted by the gun lobby, Texas doesn't really want to change. Or, as Harold Dutton, a state legislator, remarked: "In Texas, we have this idea that we can mess with my wife and my dog, but don't mess with my pick-up or my rifle." Far from going ballistic in favour of gun control, Texas passed a bill allowing Texans to carry concealed handguns.

The indifference over what to do about the anarchic proliferation of guns is not confined to Texas. In Washington, the Brady Bill (a modest gun control measure named after Ronald Reagan's press secretary Jim Brady who was maimed in the 1981 assassination attempt) was allowed to expire by the earlier Republican-dominated House.

Even after the bloody shooting at Virginia Tech, there is no serious attempt at gun control. Gun lobby's favorite plea that guns don't kill, people kill people is transparent sophistry. In fact, people with guns kill people. Without guns, it would have been impossible for a lone gunman to kill 32 people at Virginia Tech. Gun lobby's another contention that gun control only penalizes law-abiding citizens is patently false. Cho Seung-Hui was a law-abiding citizen before the shooting.

But the American political classes remain oblivious to the depth of the problem stemming from the anarchic proliferation of guns in America. As such, the more likely outcome may be that the every day, slow-motion shootouts will continue across America -- and that there will be more Killeens, Columbines and Virginia Techs. Australian Prime Minister John Howard touched the crux of the problem when commenting on Virginia Tech: "We took action [after a similar massacre in Australia a few years ago] to limit the availability of guns and we showed national resolve that gun culture that is such a negative in the United States would never become a negative in our country."

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Sheikh Hasina's return
Now that the AL chief is back to the country, it will only further expose the bankruptcy of the govt. move to prevent her from coming back.

Reader

One-mail

Sidhu's comments

Graciousness is an admirable quality; we respect those persons who possess it. Indian cricket captain Rahul Dravid is one of them, though India had to suffer defeat to Bangladesh. He acted most graciously, we praise him for it. But former Indian cricketer Sidhu shocked me by what he said in a TV programme. Referring to the forthcoming Indian cricket team's visit to Bangladesh he maliciously said that Indian cricketers would thrash Bangladeshi cricketers 'black and blue' and that Bangladeshi cricketers are still minnows.

I think the remarks are uncalled for and Sidhu only belittled himself.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Troublemakers back again?

The homegrown terrorists have come back again. Their presence has been felt in three major railway stations. Luckily, there was no casualty as reported in the BBC Bengali service news. The BBC also aired comments of the security experts, the police chief, and a key adviser on the issue. The major political parties have also expressed their concern.

One of the security experts mentioned that the people of Bangladesh are opposed to any kind of terrorist activities, therefore we need to create strong awareness among the people to help combat terrorist acts. This is absolutely true. People's vigilance is a precondition to combat terrorist acts. In this regard, one can expect the law enforcing agencies to provide necessary information for the people to act or react. Six JMB leaders were hanged recently. One thing remains un-revealed i.e. who are their patrons and behind the emergence of terrorist activities in Bangladesh, and who gave training and financed their activities; are they active again? This is an old question and will come back again and again until some definitive answers are found and released for public information. The other important question is, did the six hanged terrorists give any kind of operational details of their activities since they had admitted their guilt? If they have, the people need to know. If any information is kept secret for national security, at least the people can be informed what the government considers the people should know to help combat terrorism.

Reader

One-mail

'Jadid al-Qaeda'

Suspected as the new Islamic militant outfit though to a small extent, it is threatening NGO employees and Ahmadiyyas and probably trying to serve the message that JMB is not the conclusion, but an intermediate process!

Reader

One-mail

Democracy and discontent

I refer to the excellent post editorial by Prof. Manzur Rahman of San Diego University, California.

The advocates of so called democracy (rightly termed kleptocracy), as it has been practised by our leaderships since independence without exception, will certainly find the materials contained in this column most unpalatable. What we have been used to seeing & experiencing in Bangladesh for the last 36 years leaves us with no choice but to endorse /condemn in one voice the evils of the practice that was once formulated to set the course of statesmanship to the best interest of mankind. Founding fathers of the USA (adaptors of the noble concept) perhaps could never imagine that monsters like Hitler & many others every day would be in a position to assume the authority through the same mechanism to cause "holocaust"/genocides etc that many of us in our past 70s witnessed with horror that still remains fresh in our dreadful nostalgic memory. Of course Bush and others mentioned by Manzur even to day continue to get away with the blood-baths under the auspicious cover of UN mandates to establish "A govt. of the people, by the people, for the people" in Iraq & elsewhere.

Certainly Lee & Mahathir of Malaysia Peninsula knew it better to adopt rule of democracy as it suited their people as well as their environment best. They did not fail like our most revered leader, "Bangabandhu" due to blunders, conspiracies of all kinds which de-stabilised the nation in its infancy.

The concluding paragraph of the subject article sums it up very correctly to say the least, "The tree is worth for the fruit it bears" or "The taste of the pudding is in eating". Let us all pray & hope as also mentioned in CA's address to the nation- everything goes the way the course is set and the people of this country can wait for 18 months for a new era that has to be very much different from what we had from AL or BNP in the past 36 years.

Z. Rahman
Gulshan, Dhaka

Teachers and politics

Governance in every sector has so deteriorated that one can gain admission in Dhaka University, once known as the Oxford of the East, spending some amount of money, irrespective of educational competency. It means that certain number of seats is taken away from candidates eligible for

admission by elements who do not deserve to be a student of the university. These elements becoming students with the collaboration of a vicious circle are virtually polluting the total environment of the university. This is a matter of great frustration and disappointment that demands corrective action on priority basis. A strong taskforce has to be urgently formed to deal with the issue and find out the culprits involved. Every culprit must be brought to justice.

The Public University is meant for providing higher education to deserving candidates selected through an equal opportunity process of merit judgment and people of the country pay for efficient delivery of this national task of topmost importance. In doing so, there is no scope to be complacent by delivering certificates when the ultimate goal of the authorities is to ensure quality of education and competing with other educational institutions around the world or at least within the region calling for constant vigilance for curriculum updating, innovation in teaching method development, rapport development with employers to meet their HR need, etc. In this age of globalization, competency of universities is of utmost importance because the graduates they produce face global business competition and new challenges.

The nation is passing through a critical period when we are determined to accomplish the pro-people reforms initiated by the incumbent CTG. At this stage, university teachers are needed to overcome supporting party politicians and their politics and concentrate on national issues and devote their time to research works. I strongly urge the teachers to sit together to take the decision of detaching themselves from party politics. Student politics will no longer remain as an issue of concern after teachers detach themselves from politics.

Due to the then leadership crisis after war of independence the student community gradually got involved in party politics and as of today the nation is paying the price.

Muklesur Rahman, MBA (MIS)
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Shopping hours

I think the present caretaker government should once again seriously consider re-fixing the shopping hours which they have fixed, especially for the shopping malls. It is not very feasible to go along with the present hours which has been fixed only up to 7.00pm in the evening. It is important to mention that most offices run from 9.00am to 6.00pm and some offices even continue up to 7.00pm. So it has become extremely difficult for the office goers to buy essentials of their choice after the office hours. Take my case, for example. I had been trying

to buy some brands which I use for shaving. I can't get the time to buy them. Because when I come out of the office I find almost all the shopping malls closed.

I would, therefore, like to request the authorities to at least extend the time for one more hour: please keep the malls open till 8.00pm. I hope most city dwellers will agree with me.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka

Set up a hospital

People of Sirajgonj need a hospital for treatment of chest diseases. The number of people suffering from chest diseases is increasing rapidly in the district but there is no chest hospital.

The authorities concerned should look into the matter on a priority basis.

Iffatara Asha
Department of Zoology

Sirajgonj Govt. College, Sirajgonj

Wasa billing

It is reported that steps are being taken to streamline Wasa's revenue administration. I have some suggestions:

1. Stop the practice of guesswork billing. Take meter reading every month and prepare bills showing actual consumption within specific dates.

2. The distribution of consumers' booklet in the past served no purpose. Never was any entry made in the booklet to make it obligatory for the meter readers to record in it every reading. Preferably, the booklet should be replaced by a simple cardline.

3. To motivate consumers to economise water use, coin an appropriate slogan and print it prominently on the bills. Standard per capita requirement of water should also be given so that the amount overused/wasted by a household, if any, becomes apparent.

M.A. Hashim

Mirpur Road

Dhaka

CU journalism dept.

Students of Communication & Journalism Department of Chittagong University have been demanding that this department be brought under social science faculty with a view to creating more opportunities for graduates in the job market.

As reported in the press, the department is under social science faculty in Dhaka and Rajshahi universities.

In my opinion, the dept of communication and journalism can be placed under social science faculty or even science faculty. Because communication and journalism is a discipline which deals with psychology of human behaviour, sociology of human society plus a wide range of science subjects from agriculture to medicine.

I sincerely hope that the Chittagong University authorities will

review the matter and take an appropriate decision in this regard.

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Dept. of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Dhaka

Why penalise the taxayers?

In a country of 14 crore people it is learnt that some 20 lakh people obtained TIN number, out of which only 8 lakh are really paying tax. It is clear that a staggering number lies out of the tax bracket. The present government has taken a welcome step to expand the number of taxpayers.

However, one thing is troubling a section of taxpayers. For a good number of years the previous governments gave options to the taxpayers to pay tax on previously undeclared savings, a process called "whitening of black money." A person may have money from many sources which may not have been declared in the tax returns. I can guarantee that almost all the taxpayers have certain amounts which are beyond that declared one, not to speak of the non-taxpayers.

Shall we assume that it was better that we kept silent and not responded to the offer of the government? Where will the government's credibility stand when people will treat this as a trap, and in future any attempt whatsoever will be looked upon suspiciously as 'a wolf in sheep's skin'. No one wants to cheat his own country.

Mofizur Rahman Khan
Motijheel, Dhaka

Sk. Hasina and Khaleda Zia

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I noticed with great dismay that your government has not been able to handle political issues efficiently. The reason that I would like to mention here is that I do not understand why the government had been trying to send Khaleda Zia abroad and blocking Sk. Hasina from returning home. As a citizen of Bangladesh, they have the

right to live in their own country. It is certainly a gross violation of human rights to forcibly send anyone abroad and not to allow anyone to return home.

If these two persons have committed anything wrong then bring them to justice, try them, show the people of Bangladesh their misdeeds for which Bangladesh lost credibility both at home and abroad. Do not set an example of Pakistan. We must not copy Pakistan.

The government has done a great job since taking over state power on January 11, 2007. The government has our full support for that, but we condemn the way it was handling the cases of these two leaders. This is unacceptable to us.

Please focus your efforts on; a) anti-corruption drive, b) streamlining CEC and c) separation of the judiciary. We firmly believe that if the government can hold a credible election by the year 2008 and establish a solid foundation on the above three areas, then Bangladesh should be able to move forward in the future with not much trouble.

In fine, I would like to say that if you try to do everything, then there is the risk of failing or undermining the successes that you have already achieved.

An expatriate Bangladeshi
Ethiopia

Harmful SO₂

The demand of vehicles is increasing day by day. So the demand of fossil fuels such as diesel, petrol etc is also increasing rapidly. As a result of using such fuels, different types of injurious



Student politics

The government is contemplating a ban on student politics. In this connection, I have some points to make:

(1) Student politics should not be banned fully; it will create the vacuum of national leaders in future.

(2) As Bangladesh is a sovereign country and is currently marching forward towards better democracy, the students must not be involved in national politics.

(3) There must be difference and distance between national and student politics. Students must not become pawns of their parent political parties.

(4) Most importantly, student politics must be restricted only to academic issues.

SaifTinku

On e-mail

particles are getting mixed with the air. One of this is SO₂, which is a colourless gas. It has harmful effects such as suffocation, bronchitis, acid rain and various other effects on plants and animals.

The WHO has legislated some laws to contain the menace. If we make the best use of our natural gas, solar energy, then we can somewhat reduce such effects.

Is anybody listening?

M.I.Arif

Dept. of Chemistry

Jahangirnagar University

Anew Bangladesh

First, I would like to convey my best wishes to the interim government for the service they have already rendered to the nation. I also salute the 10 members of this government who came to serve this nation in a very critical situation with their brave hearts.

We appreciate every step taken by the government. But now we are a bit confused. The government's handling of the top two leaders has raised some questions that baffle us.

Please don't break our hearts. Please do whatever is right, lawful and logical and also clear to the people of this country. We, the people of this country, are with you.