

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.

A billion trees!



When I was a child, I knew that a 'Mahogany tree' in our house belonged to me. I felt like something inexpressible in my mind when I watched the growing of the tree along with me. My father planted it on the day I was born. Then the tree was cut down when I got married at the age of 25 years. It was the culture of the southern region of our country. The tree helps the poor father of a girl child to bring her up and meet the expenses during her marriage. So, this culture of "planting one tree for one child" all over the country can be practised.

During the national tree plantation programme and "World Environment Day" celebrations we can remind ourselves that only trees can save us from all kinds of natural disasters caused by

deforestation and global warming caused by industrialisation. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has launched a campaign called "Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign" with the objective of planting at least one billion trees worldwide during 2007. Under the campaign, people, communities, organisations, businesses and industries, civil societies and governments are being encouraged to plant trees. The objective is to plant at least one billion trees worldwide during 2007.

The idea of "Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign" was inspired by Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize winner for 2004 and founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement, which has planted more than

30 million trees in 12 African countries since 1977. When a corporate group in the United States told Professor Maathai that it was planning to plant a million trees, her response was: "That's great, but what we really need is to plant a billion trees."

So let us plant trees by ourselves in this rainy season. If we don't have any land we can plant trees in a park or public place and nurture them for our future.

Zebunnessa Laizu
Telecommunication programme
Asian Institute of Technology
Thailand

Overseas branches of political parties

Bangladesh should never allow any political party to have an overseas branch for two simple reasons.

1. This will allow political parties to siphon money out of the country or bring in foreign money.

2. Secondly, it will create a new law and order situation in foreign countries. For example, the UAE nationals cannot indulge in political activities in their country. How would their government allow Bangladeshis to be involved in politics?

Moreover, we are politically so intolerant to each other that each political party has more than three offshoots. All these factions are always clamouring for a position in the local community and fighting all the time.

Once the government allows any party to have overseas branch, infighting would extend beyond our borders creating immense problem for the host nation. They would declare overseas Bangladeshis as 'unwanted' elements. The result of which would be devastating for our expatriate community, as these countries would stop recruiting

Bangladeshis considering them as 'trouble makers'.

Dr Reza Khan
Head Of Zoo Section
Public Parks And Horticulture
Department
Dubai Municipality
United Arab Emirates

Election rules

I would like to request you as a general citizen to include the following provision in the reform agenda of the Election Commission.

The academic qualification of an MP candidate should be graduation at least.

Md. Golam Quader
One e-mail

Leaders' statements

When we read some statements of ex-government leaders saying they are working for the people of Bangladesh and the CTG should arrange for a fair and free election as early as possible because people want to see them working in a corruption-free country, etc, etc, the only thing that comes to my mind goes so well in Bangla which is "Bhuter mukhé Ram nam".

Why are we so naive? Why do the newspapers publish such statements? Are we deaf and dumb?

N.G. Chaudhury
Luxembourg

Dr. Kamal Hossain's apology

Certain apologies come from the heart and others from the brain, the one not accepted by the people comes from the brain and doesn't deserve to be accepted.

People of this country are simple but not foolish; they know their friends by deeds, not by mere words.

Muklesur Rahman, MBA (MIS)
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

I feel like writing something after reading Mr. Badrul Ahsan's article on Dr. Kamal. I agree with the writer. It was really amazing to have an apology from such an eminent person.

I cannot remember any other politician who apologised publicly.

Raihan
CUET

I am writing this letter to express my satisfaction with Mr. Ahsan's analysis of one of our key politician's apology. The apology gave a hint that the person had no knowledge of the corruption that his previous 'political' friends indulged in. I did not personally expect such a gesture from a person of his stature.

If he said that he had decided to befriend them because they were lesser of the two evils, I would have understood his point.

Ashikur Rahman
Post Graduate student
London School of Economics
UK

Rules are different for us

I write to you, to every conscious, patriotic citizen of Bangladesh, that I have started to feel we are slowly inching towards our same old nature and "corrupt" schemes and designs, waiting to find 'free for all' conditions and get back to old habits of bribery, lethargy and mismanagement in every sphere of our lives!

Chilling tales have come to the fore, and the same old political 'personalities' are talking about restoring democracy when they are the ones to destroy it in the first place by demonstrating sheer irresponsibility! Quite a few innocent people died. Is anybody held responsible for such misdeeds?

In the name of democracy and the 'people card', some are simply impatient to get back to the chair, so that all hell may be let loose again!

Foreign missions, EU, UK, USA, and now even India, are advising us how to practise democracy and secularism, and almost everything! They are trying to advise the CTG when and how to hold elections, so that a new government of their choice can be installed!

When plundering was the order of the day for the last ten years, where was their free advice? Do we go to advise them? Why is no lesson of democracy given to Egypt, KSA, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Syria and some African countries? Because of "Democracy of Convenience"?

Many educationists write from abroad about the task the CTG has to perform, and they support its measures. Please do not be impatient, wait and see the outcome. We simply love the nation's new found freedom, and so do many NRBs.

So, my request to the CTG: please carry on and show results. Most people want the reforms to go ahead. Please ensure peace and sanity, then ask the EC to hold the elections.

Anonymous
Dhaka

Budget 2007-08

The proposal in the budget to realise Advance Income Tax at source at the rate of Tk 1,000 at the time of issuance & renewal of trade licence by the City Corporation is a financial burden, particularly for Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and is directly counterproductive to the spirit of the current reform initiatives to lower the costs of doing business.

Dr Abdus Sattar Syed
Ace Data Products, Dhaka

Smoking in public places

Enacting anti-smoking laws and organising a social movement, as called by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, are not enough to curb smoking.

Only strict enforcement of laws can free the society from the evil of smoking. Still we see errant smokers in public places forcing non-smokers to experience passive smoking and exposing them to various deadly diseases.

Even walkways, where many elderly people take their morning and evening stroll, are being polluted by the errant young smokers roaming around in groups. This is high time to take punitive action against all such smokers.

Shamsul Huda
Dhanmondi

Bashabo residents' woes

Thanks to Rizanuzzaman Laskar for his write-up "Bashabo residents fear catastrophic monsoon" bringing the sufferings of Bashabo residents to light.

It has been a horrible experience for us to live in the neighborhood where roads are dug up almost round the year. Why dig the road during the rains? And there is water logging on a regular basis.

Who will answer our questions?

Kazi Ahsan Maruf
Sobujbagh, Dhaka

Foreign university branches

The Daily Star has come a long way in promoting "People's right to know". Still, it must go a long way to attain its goals. I applaud the efforts made by The Daily Star towards promoting good governance. Today's (June 13) report, "Low quality foreign university branches "selling' degrees" is however an example of hearsay journalism. It must be remembered that anything published in print is perceived to be true by the general public.

My first question is, has the reporter tested the degrees? Has he actually found out what the institutes are really doing? Let me lay bare some facts as examples:

IBCS Primax, for example, has been offering NCC (UK) diploma and degrees since 1992. Seeing the success of graduates and the demand of the local market Daffodil, Neural, Bhuiyan, Soft-Ed and IBIT joined the bandwagon.

The graduates from these institutes hold good IT positions and also contribute to outsourcing firms. Many graduates have got a credit transfer to foreign universities, have been accepted by Master's and PhD programmes abroad. To find out the quality of these degrees, the employers of these graduates need to be consulted!

What do these institutes of IT do? National Computing Centre of UK has been in existence for over 38 years and has over 250,000 students worldwide. NCC conducts its exams through the British Council in Bangladesh. The exam papers are published and marked in UK and certificates are issued by authorised bodies in the UK. Each

year of NCC has a local project component that is moderated by a local and also regional moderator. Regular visits are paid by officials of NCC to check on the local work. The work done by the institutes can be likened to coaching centres - they only prepare the candidates for the professional exams that are conducted at the British Council. These institutes do not claim to be 'universities' - they simply do coaching for the professional qualifications.

The government at one point had announced that the market needs 10,000 IT graduates annually to cater to the needs of the local market and the needs of outsourcing companies. How many graduates do the public and the UGC approved private universities produce out of the 10,000 needed? The institutes

have actually approached the UGC several times, even invited the immediate past state minister of education to an international NCC conference and submitted papers to the UGC to no avail. To carry on their business of coaching, however, the institutes have valid trade licence and TIN numbers. To send foreign exam fees, the institutes are enlisted with Bangladesh Bank and are allowed by the government to send student fees.

Without investigating the contribution that these institutes are making to the IT industry in Bangladesh, and without addressing the repeated pleas for recognition, the UGC has simply declared these institutes as illegal. Without thorough investigation the newspapers are giving lip service to the

UGC.

As the future of the existing students, the faculty, the administrators of these institutes are all at stake, I urge the authorities concerned to conduct a thorough investigation into all aspects of what these institutes are doing and suggest that The Daily Star arrange a round table to come up with what should be done.

Yousuf M Islam, PhD
Associate Professor and Director
Teaching, Learning Centre
BRAC University

Our rivers

Once Bangladesh was known as the land of rivers that formed a web-like pattern. These days most of the rivers --especially the major ones --are in a sickly condition. Human encroachment, siltation of the riverbed, increasing salinity --these are some of the problems that the rivers are plagued with. Again water pollution has taken such an ugly turn that many of our rivers are almost choked with pollutants.

In addition, the establishment of dams and barrages in the upstream by the neighbouring country added to the woes of the rivers whose sources are located in that country. Here, we

can cite the River-linking Project that, once materialized, would spell disaster for the rivers. Consequently, this alluvial plain will turn into an arid region. This will, no doubt, hamper the agricultural activity which is the main pursuit of most of the Bangladeshis.

Given the fact that the overall environment of this land depends so much on the rivers, the government must protect the rivers which are the main sources of fresh water.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

