

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.



Iran scene

I am writing with reference to letter: "Iran-USA relations," by Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal (June 18). Dr. Colachal writes about Iran's determination to develop peaceful nuclear energy. But before developing nuclear power, Iranian leaders might do well to take into consideration the dangers inherent in nuclear power and learn from the near-catastrophic accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

The most famous US nuclear accident took place just two weeks after the release of the anti-nuclear film, The China Syndrome, starring Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon. When the film was released, it was immediately attacked by the nuclear industry for depicting an impossible situation. Yet on March 28, 1979, a series of failures turned an equipment malfunction at Three Mile Island, in Pennsylvania, into a drama that mirrored many of the scenes of The China Syndrome.

As Time magazine wrote at the time: "Reassuring statements spewed from the plant's press spokesmen, sounding as if they were taken right out of the script for The China Syndrome." As the accident progressed, it became clear that no one had any idea what to do. The Kemeny Commission set up by then President Jimmy Carter to investigate the accident, later found that complacency had so pervaded the industry that "we are convinced that an accident like Three Mile Island was eventually inevitable." It judged that a meltdown had been avoided through sheer luck.

Or as one witness put it, "Bells were ringing, lights were flashing, and everyone was grabbing and scratching." Two after the start of the accident, Harold Denton, a senior official of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, told the plant managers to start evacuating people before any serious release of radioactivity. Yet, a day later, they had done little about it. Most people took upon themselves to flee the area.

Similarly, before Chernobyl accident, the Soviet scientists and engineers were confident that there was no danger in the use of nuclear energy. In 1985, a year before Chernobyl, the staff at the plant were interviewed for an article for Soviet Life, an official English language magazine for distribution in the United States aimed at readers who had grown skeptical of nuclear power after Three Mile Island. Nikolai Fomin, Chernobyl's chief engineer, assured the world that his plant was "completely safe" for both people and the environment. Boris Chernov, a turbine operator, told his interlocutors: "There is more emotion in the fear of nuclear power plants

than real danger."

The article in Soviet Life kept returning to the question of safety. Vitaly Skiyerov, the Ukrainian energy minister, assured the visiting journalists: "The environment is securely protected. Sealed buildings and harmless waste disposal, preclude any discharge into the external environment." Vladimir Voloshko, the mayor of Pripyat where the reactor is located, even sounded an environmental note while talking about car-parking problems: "We don't want cars to squeeze out the people. We believe the town of Pripyat should be as safe and clean as the power plant." The rest belongs to history.

Today, Pripyat and areas around it are thoroughly contaminated by the radioactive fallout of the accident. Children and animals are being born with birth defects and genetic problems. As Timothy Mousseau, a University of South Carolina biologist who studied barn swallows at Chernobyl, says a high proportion of the birds suffer from radiation-induced sickness and genetic damage. Another group of biologists led by Anders Mollar, of Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris, said that in a study of 7,700 birds examined since 1991, they found 11 rare or unknown abnormalities in the bird population of Chernobyl. The environmental group Greenpeace reported that children are being born with similar disability. The victims of nuclear accidents belong to the future. When he was in Moscow immediately after Three Mile Island, the governor of Pennsylvania, Dick Thornburgh, made, it seems, an astute analogy between members of the Soviet nuclear establishment and nuclear enthusiasts in the West. He was right to wonder whether the accident at Three Mile Island would make a difference in the Soviet Union. Would the unbridled enthusiasm for nuclear power of the Soviet experts be moved by the questions of safety raised by a serious accident particularly if it happened on their own doorstep? The question remains germane in Iran today. Moreover, with a country rocked by frequent earthquakes, nuclear reactors remain extremely vulnerable. Any nuclear accident, caused by either equipment malfunction or earthquake might trigger a catastrophe of epic proportions.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Price hike

At present all national dailies & electronic media are covering the news of price hike of all essential items and this price hike is continuing for a long time.

The government and the media are blaming the business syndicate. If someone goes to purchase a shirt, he must pay more than before. If you purchase cosmetic goods, you must pay more. If someone rides a rickshaw, he must pay a higher fare. If you sit in a restaurant to take tea & gossip, it is costlier now.

So what can people do?

Md. Zillur Rahaman
IBBL, Sadarghat Branch, Dhaka

President of India

The post of President in India is offered to one of the most loyal politicians who would submissively act as an automatic rubber-stamp of the ruling dispensation where prime minister decides every thing. Once elected or selected for the position, the President does the things the Prime minister, the Parliament or the Cabinet wants and dictates to him. Being a mere rubberstamp affixable on the documents concerning decisions sent to him by any of them, he cannot reject any of them. The responsibilities are clearly marked as "norms" for the incumbent President. His options to choose are, if not practically nil, thus extremely limited, even when to decide a crucial matter concerning security or constitutional discrepancy that the above-said three sections either overlook or ignore, unless, of course, he decides to fight the matter over. The President, however, can enjoy plenty of privileges including regular foreign trips undertaken for sighting purposes under the cover of the so-called official trips abroad.

One, however, fails to understand when the responsibilities of the President are so limited, why the political class makes a big hue and cry over the issue of selection of the President and follow a lengthy process for this? The Prime Minister can as well appoint a person of his own choice. But then, when a Prime Minister does everything in the country, where is the need for a President? And if affixing rubberstamp could be done better by an insignificant official, why does a country like India have a post of President at all?

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU
New Delhi

Public exams

The SSC and the HSC and other equivalent exams will always start from the first working day of February and April respectively from 2010. I think this is a decision that must be appreciated.

It will ensure that the graduation level classes will start from July, the beginning of the academic year.

Saif Tinku
On e-mail

Tarique Rahman

I fully agree with Mr. Humayun Hyder of Zigatala. I also don't have any personal grudge against Tarique Rahman and I was never connected with any political party. I do not find any good reason and don't understand why he should be given division in jail at the cost of taxpayers.

SD Alam
Indira Road, Dhaka

Good or evil?

The eternal question of all time and a matter of intellectual debate; which can be interesting, intriguing and thought-provoking is that which came first in creation; good or evil? As children we used to roll around in our limited imagination, "Which came first? Chicken or eggs?" To an extent, it's still a puzzle, for the egg to come a rooster and a hen were needed to start with; for the two creatures, at least two eggs had to be there! How did it happen? Was it chicken or egg first?

Looking back to mankind's origin,

religion states that mankind came from The Almighty's first creation--Adam, followed by Eve. They started life in heaven; the epitome of all things good! Evil however lurked round the corner in the form of Satan who provoked and misled Eve into eating the forbidden fruit.

It resulted in their banishment to Earth; where evil and good go hand in hand in coexisting together! Satan was the evil angel; defying the Almighty; and refusing to prostrate to Adam; His finest creation. Eve was not there; she came later to be enticed by Satan.

Be that as it may, I apologise to all women if I hurt their sentiments because I rationally believe that good and evil are both present in us - women and man. I hope most rational persons will accept this logical observation.

Both good and evil are embedded in mankind; it is to us to see which becomes dominant and which we relegate; that is the paradox of human character.

A reader
On e-mail

Mismanagement in health dept.

Gross mismanagement is taking place in the health department. For example, according to a recent report, foreign currency worth Tk 4,000 crore is going to neighbouring countries every year due to mismanagement in the health department. Most of this money could be saved if treatment and investigations could be done in Bangladesh. Responsible people like doctors, health department officials and policy makers should be held accountable for this unnecessary loss. Putting VAT for specialists may not help consumers. Why specialists see ordinary patients should be the question. Indiscriminate use and abuse of antibiotics and steroid without prescription is another serious problem.

These are only the tip of the iceberg. There is no consumers' society who can talk in favour of poor and low middle class people, forming eighty percent of the consumers. So we need an up-to-date Health Policy. I strongly suggest that all the stakeholders of the health department and health service consumers' representatives meet and identify the loopholes and the solutions.

Our health officials should be aware of health economics to save foreign currency.

Dr. Azizul Karim
Australia

Extortion or donation?

Upon reading the article by Dr. Khan in which he elaborated his views of extortion and donation, I felt it was incomprehensive and misleading in as much as submitting that the plaintiff did not have a case. First of all, any offence has two aspects, the criminal act and the intention behind the act. This intention differentiates a criminal offence from a non-criminal one.

A lawyer
Dhaka

What is Bangladesh?

Whenever something appears strange in the flow of events in Bangladesh, I come back to you to express my opinion and feelings.

We are all ecstatic that a self confessed convicted murderer of the Father of the Nation and his family, Mohiuddin has been returned to Bangladesh, thanks to the fairness of US Laws and the strong stance taken by the Bangladeshi expatriates in North America, including myself.

But we were shocked to hear the Law Adviser saying that his government has a different agenda and he has no time to look into these matters!!!!

What is Bangladesh now? It's a strange land!

M. Hussain
On e-mail

Caretaker government

Would you please interview, study and make a report on "After the departure of caretaker government". It worries us as to what will happen after the CTG quits.

Referring to the all-time classic western "The Magnificent Seven", we the victims in no way would like to be in the clutch of those so-called democratic elements again when The Magnificent Seven depart after finishing



the names which the government published. So, it cannot be regarded as hearsay journalism.

Fahmi Al Mahmood
On e-mail

An account of life!

Our birth is our opening balance. Our death is our closing balance. Our prejudiced views are our liabilities. Our creative ideas/ good deeds are our assets. Heart is our current asset. Soul is our fixed assets. Brain is our fixed deposit. Thinking is our current account. Goodwill & achievements are our capital. Character & morals-- our stock-in-trade. Friends are our general

their job.

Who are the brave and honest souls who will shoulder the responsibility of serving the people and the country? And please no more of those existing parties who in the guise of serving the people have actually looted them like the gang of Calvero before the arrival of The Magnificent Seven.

N.G. Chaudhury
Luxembourg

Sheikh Hasina's interview

Thanks to the DS for taking an interview of Sheikh Hasina, the AL chief, and for publishing the same for our information. One thing appeared from the interview with Hasina that she was not fully prepared to respond to the sensitive questions, as a result she sounded emotional and offered a counter proposal, not a well thought out reply. These interviews are giving an opportunity to the leaders to come up with self defence.

The nation is already getting the feeling how much price is paid by the nation and politicians as well when leaders resort to talking off the cuff instead of giving a well considered reply or proposal for reforms. Just we can mention about the transparent ballot boxes. The voter list with photo and national identity card are projects that must be completed before the election in 2008. Because of sheer hardware logistic requirement, the task appears to be a difficult one. Sooner we realise the reality the better. "NO" vote concept is another area of concern. It might create a negative attitude among the voters and the turn-out might be affected as already mentioned by one writer in the DS. Who is going to



propagate the idea to the voters? Will it be constitutional?

Regarding the overall political situation, one can comment that the BNP is better in crisis management with due calm and confidence(?) backed by a good brand of "think tanks" who are consistent since the birth of the BNP. Their major failure is to allow the rise of the "Paribatantra".

The Jamaat is a political force. What about reforms in the Jamaat?

A reader
on e-mail

Consumers' rights



I noticed a DS news item on 13 June quoting Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) on the differences of prices of vegetables between growers' level and consumers' level. It has quoted that in some cases the difference is 350% higher at the consumers' level. The vegetable market is a buyer dictated market and the poor growers are victims of syndicated middlemen who buy these products from growers for marketing them in the cities/towns. There is reason why the situation has reached this stage; transportation costs have doubled in the recent past, these vegetables change many hands before reaching the consumers in the Dhaka city etc. There is no system or easy way to help the poor growers who cannot even manage two meals a day. They are growing vitamin-enriched vegetables for us keeping themselves unfed or half-fed and remaining poor always.

On the contrary, the market in the Dhaka city is a seller-dictated market. If we look into the prices of fast foods and packet foods being charged by the producers/growers, we feel alarmed. I presume the fast food bakers are charging 350% to 1000% in most cases. Let me put a few examples (a) A nun roti (tandoor) stuffed on top with small cubes of pineapples, very small pieces of meat swatches, small amount of cheese and baked in a modern oven and served by well dressed caterers

in AC rooms, the growers call it in Italian language pizza, costs Tk.800.00, (b) A small beef samucha stuffed with tiny peaces of potatoes and onions, traces of beef not even visible with microscope, fried in ordinary oil, is sold in the Gulshan markets at Tk.12-15/- each, (c) 20 grams of mug daal, fried in ordinary oil and packed in a printed foil bag is sold at Tk.6.00 each pack all over Bangladesh. If 10% of our entire population take one packet of this daal a day, then the producers earn Tk 1.5 crore every day, (d) A round shaped chicken pie stuffed with only small amount of grated onion, small amount of home made mayonnaise, there is no chicken found in it, is sold at Tk.12-15/- each in ordinary fast food shops everywhere in Dhaka city.

I am sure the above prices are too high. Although we know the customers of these high priced foods are the rich, I strongly feel that there should be some brake somewhere on these undue profit makers. We should also think of the middle class, who need to have a moderate lunch with their modest income but cannot go home at lunch time because they do not have cars.

Shafiqul Islam
Dhaka



Fisheries sector

Our country is blessed with thousands of tanks and small ponds, hundreds of deep and wide flowing rivers meeting a concave shaped coastal area adjoining the rough Bay of Bengal.

It is very unfortunate that we buy white fishes for our consumption from the neighbouring countries which means we pay them for cleansing their tanks and ponds with lime stones and insecticides, employing trained and skilled fishermen and engaging their trawler fleets for fish transportation. On the contrary, many

of our large tanks and ponds remain filled with water hyacinths, planktons and rotten algae. These days due to irregular occupation mostly the untrained and unskilled people are available as fishermen for catching fishes across the country. Many of our fishing boats and trawlers are becoming idle due to depletion of the 'fish stock' in the country. The government should take the necessary steps to utilise our fisheries resources.

Golam Ashraf
Gulshan, Dhaka