

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.

Sidr and slogans

It is pretty clear that everyone knows how painful and deadly hunger is. The cyclone Sidr has devastated the whole southern region of our country. People have lost what they had. Food is the first requirement to survive. No food, no shelter. My home is in Barguna, a cyclone affected area. I know how it feels in the depth of my heart to see my fellow men starve. But I was shocked to see the news published in a daily a few days ago that a party had started demonstrating against US aid. My question is to those who were in that demonstration, "Can you sustain hunger? Have you ever remained hungry for days? What will you realise hearing the screams of the fleshless bones?"

We can't simply let our people die. Many of us drive expensive cars. But we don't feel any urgency to serve the people in distress.

Fahad
Dept. of English
University of Rajshahi

Small investors

I am a small investor of Dhaka Stock Exchange. I have already invested all my savings with some loans also. The Security Exchange Commission has the right to control the market, but the prices of all shares (except 2/3 "A" category companies) were declining before Eid. Is it an example of good management by SEC to secure the market? As I see from a newspaper, the SEC feels the market is now more secure for all small investors. I don't think so and I am totally disappointed with their views. If the share prices fall, then how the

investors become secure? As far as I know most of the small investors have sold their shares and withdrew their money from the market as they have the memories of 1996. I want to ask the authorities: are they thinking that the decreasing trend is safe for investors? We feel badly insecure.

We do not understand the hidden factors of the market and most of the investors don't want to understand that but we want a normal situation in the market, where prices will behave normally. The SEC creates this situation; the investors do not create it. So, I think the SEC and the government also have the responsibility of saving the market as soon as possible; otherwise it will be more devastating than 1996.

Please take necessary action to save us and to save the capital market.

Arefin
One-mail

Meaning of sacrifice

The ntv was airing an online fund raising programme by a London based relief organisation named "Islamic Relief". It was in the afternoon in California, USA and late night in Bangladesh on December 2/3 2007. The telecast was interesting to watch, especially the question asked by would be donors. A number of questions was asked about the modus operandi of the organisation in Bangladesh relief efforts. In support of their claim, they were projecting a tv documentary of relief work being undertaken by them in the affected areas. The moderator was supported by a high up of the organisation (looked

an Arab) and one local Bangladeshi Islamic scholar as introduced by the moderator, a Bangladeshi.

A number of questions were asked about the credibility of the organisation, and also their links to Bangladesh authorities while running the relief efforts. They defended their organisation and the relief efforts in Bangladesh. Well enough, I have no comments as I have no clear idea about this organisation and their operational details in Bangladesh.

The reason I am writing this letter is: There were good number of questions regarding "Korbani" and relief. A number of would be donors asked whether instead of giving "Korbani" they could use the same money for relief purpose in Sidr affected areas. The answer from the fund raisers was not clear and had some hesitation to give clear "YES" or "NO" answer. I decided to call the fund raiser and say what I have done in such a situation applying my common sense. I have skipped "Korbani" this year and the amount I have sent to an affected village to support one affected family. Unfortunately, the responder from the other side told me, "You cannot do it". The story ended there. I just had a moment to tell the gentleman that I used my common sense and did it. I stand fully by what I have done using my common sense and not in contravention of my religious belief. I have no intention to spark any controversy. I will be accountable to Allah if I have done anything wrong. The Almighty Allah will forgive me.

Areader
One-mail

Unkind winter



Winter is here. For the rich the season is a bag of pleasures. They were waiting to welcome the winter. Heavy cold will not touch them at all. Their wardrobes are full of warm clothes. They will celebrate winter in a festive manner enjoying various types of pithas!

On the other hand, millions of people, particularly in the northern districts, will suffer beyond description because of poverty and the inability to protect themselves from the biting cold.

People should not only realise but also come forward to help the cold-stricken people.

Md. Golam Mostafa
Senior Executive Officer
Prime Bank Ltd
Uttara Branch, Dhaka

na, jodi na sheta manusher kache grohonjoggo hoi) I would like to conclude reciting a poem of Jibanananda Das called 'Odbhut Adhar Ek'. The teachers and students of Dhaka University will not be fed to the vultures and hyenas. (Dhaka Bishshobiddyaloye kono shikkhok othoba kono chattrar shokun or sheyal er khaddo hobe nah) Honourable Judge, May you do the rightful.

Sanjeeb Hossain
One-mail

Meaning of life

I found it interesting that a reader has been asking around about the meaning of life. I can't blame him, I often do the same thing. Interestingly (or rather, should it be obviously?) no one has yet come up with an answer, and some tell me coming up with an answer would spoil it. Personally, I do find it rather perplexing that we can barely answer the question 'what is life for' and still continue onwards with it with such overwhelming zeal. Perhaps that is why they dub it the human condition - the species which has done so much for its survival and enhancement without even understanding and penetrating the meaning of it.

I can form a half-way decent answer: that we human beings live life as ending it is too painful, and taking it to the pinnacle is too much pleasure, neither of which most of us could handle as both require tremendous effort. Hence we spread the feelings and go on with it with a semblance of the much desired 'stability'. This balancing act, as has been identified starting from the Greeks, might be a weak definition of life as we now experience and understand. But then again, it has the folly of defining 'the process' rather than 'the why' of it. Frankly, I am not sure human beings would ever understand it; or if we even do (or might have done), if the answer is not favourable to our skewed psyches, accept it even.

Despite such directionless metaphysical wondering, as the above two paragraphs surely are, I believe we should still continue to try to define life and its meaning. Even this lack of comprehension is enlightening and can make us wiser.

Monwar Hussain
Mirpur, Dhaka

Police clearance

I'm writing on this subject again. I am a Bangladeshi now living in the UK. I need a police clearance certificate. But I cannot find any form in the Internet.

I also need a police clearance certificate from the UK authorities. All the information is online. I do not need to go to the police station in the UK to get a certificate. I can apply by post - no need to send photocopy of passport. Bank statement & provisional driving licence are OK here.

How can I get it easily from Bangladesh?

SMSI
London, UK

Government servants

One of the most praiseworthy works of the CTG is finding out the corrupt people. For the first time,

the ACC is working smoothly. I really appreciate whatever they are doing. But I think at the same time the government has to do something to prevent corruption.

It's very important to increase the salaries of the government service holders; so that to fulfil their family needs they don't need to take bribe. Any graduate from any good university can easily get a job worth Tk 15,000 per month in a private company; whereas the first class BCS officers are getting much less. I have an example, my brother-in-law was planning to switch from his govt. job to a private hospital. We all supported him and the decision was great. He himself has found a huge difference between these two jobs.

After a hard work if a farmer can enjoy his success, if a student can achieve a good certificate then by servicing the govt. honestly year after year why they are not getting anything other than a very simple, poor & tensed life?

If there is a punishment for corrupt people, there should be some reward for the honest people also. Otherwise, the govt. will lose honest as well as brilliant people and nobody will be encouraged to remain honest.

Taneen Mustafa
MBA
Dhaka University

English at SSC level

It is seen that in different public exams the students fail in English mostly. But why? The reasons are not very far to seek if we deeply think over it. Even many of us definitely know the reasons of their failure in that subject. So, I am not going to highlight the same. But I could not but mention a point here that especially in the SSC exams, there are only two compositions in the questions of English 2nd paper and the students are to answer one out of the two while five compositions are set up in the questions of Bengali 2nd paper and the students are told to answer one out of five. I think that this discrimination should be removed and my suggestion is that our education policy makers set up five compositions and at least three paragraphs in English 2nd paper in lieu of two compositions and one paragraph and if it is done, the percentage of pass in SSC will increase somewhat.

Md. Abdus Salam
Asst. Teacher (English)
Joypara Pilot High School
Joypara, Dohar, Dhaka

US aid

Refer to Ms. Pasi's letter of 29 November in which she ticks off the various forms of assistance from the US government to Bangladesh. The aid that the US Government provides to Bangladesh is helpful and there is no doubt about that. However, Ms. Pasi should understand that humanitarian aid, in and of itself, will never wash away the "mistakes" of the US administration over the past five years. Illegal detentions and lack of respect for due process at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the destruction of Iraq, the killing of untold numbers of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan in "collateral damage", kidnappings, also known as extra-ordinary renditions, false reports of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, torture in

prison, and the list goes on and on. It is indeed sad that the USA, once the champion of human rights and democracy, is looked on with contempt and pity by many people in this world. Ms. Pasi, if you could write an article setting out how the US government will set these past wrongs right, that would really cause us to sit up and take notice.

In the meantime, please keep the food and water flowing.
R. Johnson
Gulshan, Dhaka

Business scene

When I get the morning newspaper, I turn to the Business Page for new developments in new products, and opening of new export markets; the challenges before the SMEs. Without entrenched corrupt practices at almost all vertical and horizontal levels, today we could have easily reached the base level of a newly developing country. Our workers are hard working and sincere, but the godfathers have no fear of God!

Our human resources are not a problem, but an asset, but our vocational training schools are far short of requirement, especially in the rural areas and small towns.

One glaring example: our furniture sector has no institutional

base; no formal and theoretical training; the apprentices learn from the semi literate ustads; and QC [quality control] is abysmal. Some of the wooden furniture I purchased in Dhaka 17 years ago were eaten up by white ants; and I lost quite a number of my home library books kept on these local bookshelves. Now synthetic boards of various types have come up, which are treated chemically, but the prices are high for the students, while the manufacturers concentrate on 'luxury items', and some are falsely branded as imported items! There should be DIY kits (do-it-yourself) cheaper kits for the students, who could assemble their own furniture from standard packages. [I assembled abroad my plywood bookshelves - much cheaper!]

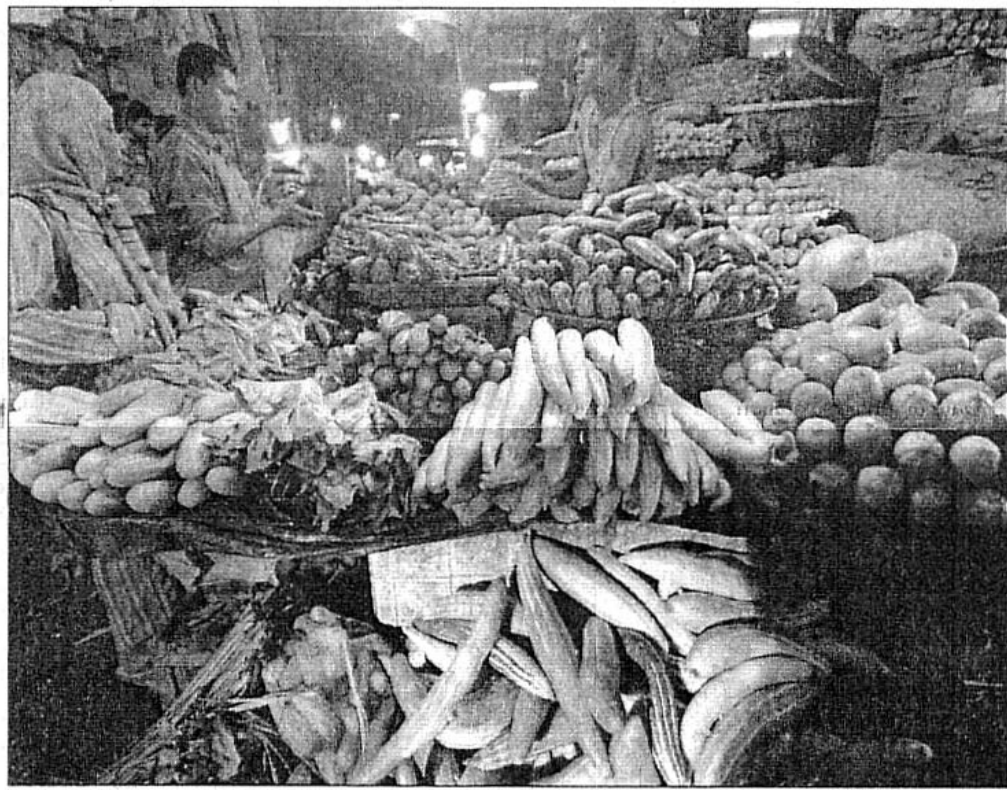
Now it is good news to read that the authorities have decided to set up furniture villages at different points in the country. Considering the huge population density in Bangladesh, the number of vocational centres for primary and school-level students is far too low to tap the natural resources of the country. We can produce a huge number of mechanics, technicians and craftsmen/women, equipped with proper qualification certi-

icates in many fields in the cottage and small industries sectors.

The point is that the small informal sectors should not be ignored (such as leather goods). But monitoring has to be widespread, and the inspection has to be honed. Here comes in E-governance. We are waiting for the fabulous \$100 student computer. The price of solar cell units have to be reduced for the LDCs. Consider the tremendous social impact of cell/mobile phones in Bangladesh - who doesn't have it: the kajer bua, the rickshaw driver, the student, and the fisherman. [A few days ago I noticed how a shopkeeper in the bazaar drove away a female beggar pestering the shoppers, with the sly remark 'He [identified him] wants your mobile number'. She fled instantly!]

The black market could be controlled using the mobile phone. The cell phone has its evil offspring; but the authorities have to be IT oriented; discarding imperialistic bureaucratic practices, [remember the name Writer's Building in British Calcutta? Keep the natives busy with pen in hand, while the decisions are taken over whiskey and soda at the club!]

A Mahasen
Dhaka



Price hike

When the prices of daily essentials are increasing rapidly and going beyond our capacity, there is no effort to stop this by the present CTG!! The daily life of ours (middle class people) is becoming really miserable day by day. But the business community is showing no sensitivity to our problems; they are trying to maximise their profits all the time. They

have formed syndicates to retain control over the market.

My question is how these so called syndicates manage to influence the decision-making process? Is there any government agency to address the issue? How can we survive?

W. Islam
Uttara, Dhaka

Another setback

It seems that there is no respite for us, first the political turmoil, crime, corruption etc. Now we are besieged by calamities one after another. Unprecedented floods engulfed us twice, then the furious cyclone struck and left a trail of devastation, we are feeling very sad, our deepest sympathy for the affected people, may the Almighty Allah give them strength to bear the ordeal.

When the present caretaker government took charge, it had to tackle many problems, now this fury of nature is an added burden. Many countries have extended their helping hands, huge amount of aid is pouring in, we express our heartfelt thanks to them.

In this depressing situation, one thing is heartening, the relief will reach the needy, the cyclone affected people will get help promptly because the administration is in able hands, who will do their utmost to alleviate the sufferings of the helpless people.

We think a long-term plan should be taken, houses should be built in such a way that when cyclone strikes in the future, damage would be minimum. We hope the authorities concerned will seriously consider it.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

A teacher's stand

Today's events at the court were no different from that of yesterday. The Judge once again framed charges and the four Dhaka University Professors were accused of violating the Emergency Power Rules 2007. As you can quite clearly see, nothing new. However something did happen today. My father after the submissions of the lawyers sought permission from the Judge to say a few words. His few words ended up as what I would term it as one of the most historic speeches made in a court of law. I do not remember all of it but here is what I remember of it in English:

"In my 33 years as a teacher of the Dhaka University, I have always held my head high. There is not a single incident which will indicate that I failed as a teacher or as a human being. However, it would not be appropriate to say that there is not a 'single' incident. In 1976, I along with my brother Colonel Abu Taher (Bir Uttam) and others were tried by a Special Military Tribunal. My brother was hanged and I was sentenced to jail along with others. That was possible because the Special Military Tribunal was not an independent one and everyone knew that what was going on was a sham in the

name of the law. Well, here I am again before a court of law facing another trial. The conditions however are very much different now. The judiciary of Bangladesh is independent now after years of struggle. The Judge that stands before me has the opportunity to do what is right. He has been given the independence to give his verdict without intimidation or pressure.

I swear with my hand across my heart that I have not done anything wrong during the incident that sparked off from the Dhaka University. It was my moral duty to extend my hand of support to my distressed students and if I ever get the opportunity to do it again I will. I did it in 1990 during the fall of Ershad, I did it in 2001 when the police entered Shamshunnahar Hall and beat up our female students. I did it again on August 20, 21, 22 and 23, 2007. The four teachers that stand before you have not stood before the government in any way. We only tried to solve the problem, we tried to calm the students, not lead them astray.

The Honourable Judge, before you make your decision, you cannot forget that not all laws are laws, not all trials are trials, unless they are accepted by the people. (Shob ain ain nah...shob bichar bichar

"Biharis in Bangladesh"

This is in response to the letter 'Biharis in Bangladesh' by Mr. Jamshaid Taher published on 30 Nov.

The conditions these people are living in are really appalling; so much has been said but hardly anything concrete has been done so far to repatriate, rehabilitate or even relocate them. The Biharis are waiting to be in their so elusive promised land. Their hopes, as it seems very clear, are never going to be fulfilled. Desperate and disillusioned, they have continued with their struggle for survival. Sometimes, their struggle has led them into immoral and unlawful activities. Whatever is the case, the huge, unhygienic camps teeming with people (deprived of their identity) are sprawled across Mohammadpur, Mirpur and many other places of Bangladesh. The human rights organisations should take the initiative and

give these people, if not their "homes in their cherished land," at least a sense of direction, so

that there can be some meaning in their lives. They can be motivated to contribute to the society and not be a huge burden on the already struggling economy of our country. Let there be some ray of hope and light in the lives of these people, many of them were born after the liberation of our country, and hence were forced to be victims of "dire poverty, hatred and ignorance." The document on the plight of the Biharis should send some people doing a bit of soul searching! The CTG, extolled for its interest and much needed action in so many sectors, could add one more feather to its cap, and take some measures to alleviate their sufferings as well.

Abraham
Dhaka

