

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.

Lawachhara forests

This has reference to a news report published in your daily of 23rd. Feb, 2009 (Page 16, column 1). The report tells us that seismic survey conducted for gas exploration did not adversely affect the biodiversity of Lawachhara forests. This should be heartening for us all. However, the IUCN survey on biodiversity is based mainly on Hoolock Gibbons. Nothing specific has been said about the "other species". What are these "other species" and how was it determined that they have not fled from the disturbed area? Any student of biodiversity will tell you that surveys based on one or a few species is not reliable. There are a few reports on avifauna of this forest, but IUCN survey apparently did not take these into account. It is the smaller animals like

squirrels, wild cats, mongoose etc. that are more likely to have been affected. Besides the Lawachhara forest is home to a number of rare species of butterflies and odonates (Dragonflies and Damselflies). I wonder why an organisation like IUCN did not include these in their survey. On the whole IUCN report may pacify general public but is certainly not acceptable.

I discussed the matter with Prof. Dr. Farid Ahsan, a wildlife biologist who did his doctoral thesis on the Gibbons of Lawachhara forests. He said he was in full agreement with my view and even requested me to include his name in my letter to you.

Shafique Chowdhury
One e-mail



We mourn

We are perplexed, we are shocked. Brutal killing that has occurred in the BDR Headquarters is inhuman. We are speechless. Due to the updated transmission of the electronic media about what was happening at the BDR Headquarters, we have seen a sad drama which is unbearable. It is a black chapter in the history of Bangladesh. Many have said that it was a mutiny; many other pointed it as a deep conspiracy. Whatever the cause is, it is true that we have lost so many talented and skilled defence officials. We have to think about it deeply. It cannot be a mutiny, it was a pre-planned killing. There should be a valid reason for a mutiny. But I don't think that killing of over 75 high ranking talented army officers, without even giving them the chance to know what their fault was, is an indication of mutiny. More or less, many Bangladeshi families have their relatives in the army. We feel proud when we say that we have our relatives who are army officers. But now we are finding the dead bodies of those talented high ranking defence officers in sewage drains! It is not a normal incident. The freedom of this country is once again questioned by this incident. We cannot tolerate such a massacre within an independent country. It seems that it was a pre-planned conspiracy to destroy our Army and the BDR together.

We urge our government to find out the criminals who were behind it. Punish them and destroy the root of this conspiracy for our long term security.

Mahmudul Karim Farsad
American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB)

We never thought we would have to see mass graves in independent Bangladesh. But yet mass graves, cold-blooded murder of innocent army officers, their family members and civilians are revisiting us. We mourn the loss of many brilliant sons and daughters of the soil.

We offer silent prayers in solidarity with the families who lost their loved ones.

We, the general people, demand proper investigation into the incident and punishment to the masterminds and those who were directly involved in the killings.

Farida Begum Popy
Shamoly, Dhaka

Drug abuse

Drug addiction is a great menace. It is more than a national problem.

If we want to get rid of this curse we should create awareness among people at all levels about the dangers of drug abuse.

Md. Russel Hussain
ETE
Metropolitan University
Sylhet

Massacre at Pilkhana

How can we call ourselves a civilized nation when 100 people are herded together, shot and their bodies burned.

Twenty years ago a girl was left to cry for two hours beside a crashed car before she was rescued in a tunnel in Italy as motorists swished by. We could take cue from the outrage and shame that Italians demonstrated against their insensitive behaviour. We lack the moral fibre of the Vietnamese monks dousing their bodies with petrol and immolating themselves on the Hanoi streets, but every Bangladeshi citizen could in atonement go out to the public square of their respective places of residence and do "nakey-khat" because some of us became less than human beings during those two days.

A concerned citizen
One e-mail

The mind-boggling killing of valiant army officers has created a sense of mourning in the air. People from home and abroad have stood aghast at the extent of the barbarity. We have no words to express our outrage, anger and disgust at the mindless bloodshed in the name of mutiny.

What on earth made the army officers being killed so inhumanely?

Is it merely a BDR mutiny stemming from grievances?

Going by the events of February 25 doubts are creeping into our minds whether there was any involvement of extraneous forces which is a deep-rooted conspiracy against our sovereignty damaging the major elements of our defence capability-- the army and the BDR.

As to the incident, our political leaders have, yet again, started trading blame. They are, as usual, trying to capitalise on a grave catastrophe. Shame on our politicians! Behold! It is a national crisis. It is a threat to our sovereignty. Stop pointing accusing finger at each other. Let us stand united to face the problems and help overcome the loss of our defence capability.

We pray for the salvation of the martyrs' souls and hope that the Almighty will grant them eternal peace.

Asir Faisal
Shah Amanath Housing Society
Sholokbahar, Chittagong

Home minister

The PM gambled in the selection of her cabinet colleagues. She lost the first game in Pilkhana massacre. The carnage not only put the capability of the government in question, rather it has shaken its stability after such robust mandate in the polls.

Undoubtedly, the conspiracy and many other things will be unearthed but confidence in the home minister and her officials can never be restored fully.

A citizen
Uttara, Dhaka

Rohingyas

My attention is drawn to a report entitled "Rohingyas to be Bengalis," a report based on the announcement by Myanmar authorities at the recently held ASEAN summit (The Daily Star, 01 March 2009).

This is ridiculous and only a military regime like that of Myanmar could say so. This proposal should be rejected outright. Bangladesh should register a strong protest with regard to the attempt at labelling the Rohingyas as Bengalis.

This latest declaration by the Myanmar authorities means that the regime is not taking back the Rohingyas who are the persecuted ethnic Muslims from the western Rakhine state (formerly Arakan) of Myanmar bordering Bangladesh.

And the Myanmar authorities are now bluntly and openly trying to push back the responsibilities of the Rohingyas to the shoulder of Bangladesh.

The ASEAN nations and international communities as a whole should press the Myanmar authorities hard for stopping persecution against the Rohingyas (also on other ethnic groups), and taking those back who are out of their country. Also they should press for restoration of democracy at the top.

Bangladesh which has been hosting thousands of Rohingyas for decades should ask for a regional or international solution to the problem. Nothing could be gained from a bilateral approach that we are now looking for.

Bangladesh should also immediately take the initiative to register all the Myanmar nationals including the Rohingyas in the territory of our country. It should seek assistance from development partners and relevant UN agencies in this task.

I have been advocating for a national strategy for Bangladesh to deal with the Rohingya issue. There has been a dire need for a national legal framework to deal with the refugee issues including the Rohingyas. The latest development on the Rohingyas proves the necessity of the policy and legal framework once again.

Udatta Bikash, PhD
Freelance researcher
Dhaka

Irreparable loss

The mutiny is over, having a great span of time, 33-hours. The cruelty and atrocity of the mutiny is beyond description. How human beings, how civilized people living in this civilized world could be so cruel, so inhuman, so brutal, so beastly and so barbaric?

It is abominable, contemptuous and shameful. We hate destruction. It has been an irreparable loss to the nation.

May Allah accept the deaths as martyrdom.
Md. Joabar Iqbal
MELL, Dept. of English
Int'l Islamic University
Chittagong

An opportunity for us

Cricket is getting momentum in Bangladesh. May be we had been in progress though we have no major win in Test cricket over the big names. We had a close finish on several occasions. In ODI, two major wins over New Zealand and Sri Lanka earned international reputation and our players Sakib and Mortuza were included in the top ten. Sakib made history.

In world cricket, countries like Australia and England are not producing amazing talents in recent times. Australia have lost Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath, Adam Gilchrist and no one came to take their positions. They are struggling to retain the no. 1 position in world cricket and are facing a stiff challenge from South Africa and even India.

It is an opportunity for us to strengthen our position in world cricket through proper planning and good decision making.

Shahidul Islam Laskar
BHP, BRAC Centre
Mohakhali, Dhaka

Pogrom, not mutiny

Initially we had believed that BDR jawans were grossly discriminated against and out of pent-up frustrations they staged a mutiny. But with days passing and mass graves being dug out, it is now crystal clear that a conspiracy was hatched to destroy the whole chain of command not only in the BDR, but also in other disciplined forces. Only officers and their families have been victims in this barbarous pogrom perpetrated by a few dozens of BDR soldiers.

Everybody is asking one question: "If BDR soldiers had an intention to realize their demands on many issues, they could hold the whole community of officers as hostage like the airlines hijackers do by taking the air passengers hostage. Why did they kill the officers and their family members? Who gave them the strength? What was their escape plan?"

"There was a huge conspiracy." Now, we want to know the details of the conspiracy and identities of the conspirators. We cannot afford to lose our valiant officers at the hands of the mean cohorts of those enemies of our soil.

The killers should be hanged in some public place.

May God give strength to the bereaved families to withstand the unbearable pain of losing their kith and kin for no fault of theirs! May God help our government root out the evils from our soil!

Maswood Alam Khan
One e-mail

My thanks go out to all the media people who have worked day and night to cover massacre at Pilkhana. The private channels have been most informative and have vividly shown the world how beastly a human being could be to another. Unfortunately, some footage has left me quite flabbergasted because of their nature and I wonder whether they should have been aired live on TV. I feel that the mutilated bodies, faces of certain martyred officers should have been blurred or made less visible. I think the channels should have been more professional and not over-zealous in broadcasting such images.

They should keep in mind that news is watched by all.
FBR
One e-mail

Reorganise BDR

The heinous crime of killing, looting, burning, torture and rape perpetrated by some human faced devils at Pilkhana, Dhaka on 25 and 26 of February 2009 has put not only the name of BDR to shame but also the whole nation.

The reorganisation of BDR has started. Surely the BDR personnel who were not involved in any way in the mutiny will be retained and others who were directly or indirectly involved shall be dealt with accordingly. Senior NCOs and all JCOs who were not involved but did not actively try to put down the mutiny must also be taken to task for their failure.

The reorganisation should be started with disbandment of BDR. The name BDR must cease to exist. The retained BDR personnel and future generation of BDR personnel should be freed from the shame of bearing the name BDR.

The newly organised border security force may be suitably named.
Quazi Salimuddin
Baitulaman Housing Society
Adabor, Dhaka

Cricket and terrorism

One of the most popular games in the world, especially in this subcontinent, is now the target of terrorists in Pakistan. We do not know when it is going to end. However, it is very logical to think that the ensuing World Cup matches in the subcontinent are going to be affected. We want to see an early end to the crisis and want that the terrorists are wiped out. The sports arena must be kept safe and free from the fundamentalists and terrorist forces.

The BCB officials were still semi-positive to go ahead with the matches with the Pakistani team. Pakistan is the place of occurrence of cricket terrorism; Bangladesh is still struggling for recovery from the worst national crisis following the massacre of innocent soldiers on duty, how come some BCCB officials got access to the media to say that they still hoped to arrange Pakistan-Bangladesh cricket series?

We also love cricket, but love our country too. We need to defeat terrorism first.

We pray for an early recovery of the injured Sri Lankan players, and also pray for those who have lost their lives during the encounter with the terrorists.

A reader
One e-mail

Save our language

Bengali is one of the most used languages in the world. Bengali is the only language for which people sacrificed their lives. For this language, we have today the "International Mother Language Day".

It is highly regrettable that the standard of Bengali as a language has fallen beyond measure. People do not seem to bother about learning it correctly.

Md. Imran Sarkar
Department of Business Administration
Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet

National unity

A General in a talk show stated that our security forces can be infiltrated easily and such infiltrators are untraceable. In the recent mutiny of the BDR outside infiltrators surely were there, according to him.

Soil issue



IQBAL AHMED / DRINKNEWS

At present, the standard OM content of Bangladesh soils is less than 1%, ranging between 0.05 and 0.9% in most cases. The land area is gradually declining because of population growth, industrialisation and other infrastructure development. However, agriculture plays a key role in over all financial growth of the country, more than 70% of the population depend on agriculture. In order to feed the huge population a green revolution was designed in the 1960s and priority was given to producing more food in terms of grain through strengthening of land usage. It has created a tremendous pressure on limited land resources. New crop variety was introduced as well as chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and irrigation in the name of modernization. As a result instant objectives of more grain production have been achieved. For a shorter period Bangladesh achieved near self sufficiency in food.

A suicidal policy of extraction from soil was followed. The soil fertility conservation issue was totally ignored. As a result, soil is rapidly losing its fertility. Acreage production is getting downward despite use of elevated doses of

chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides without use of any organic fertilizer results in lack of organic matter supply which caused a lot of problems to the soil. The soil becomes hard, water holding capacity is reduced, and reduced soil microbial activities resulted in less availability of plant nutrients. Degraded soil becomes unhealthy and unhealthy soil grows unhealthy plants. Use of chemical pesticides results in pollution of the environment as they are chemical poisons. People experienced health hazards in two ways. Firstly, people eat the poisoned agricultural products and other contaminated foods like, meat, milk, fish etc from chemical agricultural production. The poison accumulates in the body and through the food chain; the toxic is condensed and creates diverse health hazards. Secondly, the chemical pesticides directly affect the farmers who use it.

We must be conscious about soil quality.

Mohammad Rajja
Gonoshashtya Samaj Vittik Medical College
Savar, Dhaka

He also said they could not be identified, as if they simply vanished into thin air.

Now, it is a fearsome claim, implying that our security forces lack security themselves and we have no remedy for that.

He has not answered how he decided that there were invisible infiltrators since he could not find any. How does he know if the story was not concocted?

In these talk shows, we see bashing of one group by another and vice versa. This is not the time for division, confrontation and reaping political benefits. We should stand united as a nation now more than ever.

Mir Mahboob Ali
Fiction Writer and Freelance Consultant
Former Senior Executive
The Bangladesh Observer

It appears that a section of our politicians and military experts (?) are unhappy with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government for choosing the path of negotiation, instead of military action in quelling the recent mutiny of a section of BDR jawans that resulted in dastardly killing of more than one hundred of our brilliant army officers serving that force on deputation.

These people, perhaps, forget that had there been military action, casualty figures would have been enormous as not only the opposing combatants but also a large

number of civilians residing in and around the Pilkhana area could have been killed in the crossfire.

Moreover, military action could have escalated and spread the fratricidal conflict throughout the country creating an anarchic situation which could threaten the very existence of our beloved motherland and turn it into another Somalia!

Jahangir Bin Alam
Purana Palatan Line
Dhaka

Peacekeepers need peace

The Pilkhana massacre has fatally wounded the nation and we have never been so united in grief. Families of the deceased are the worst victims in every respect. The survivors had helplessly witnessed the systematic butchery of their unarmed comrades. That horrific memory overpowers their joy of remaining alive.

The armed forces members, irrespective of rank and file, are mourning in the barracks. They are struggling to comfort each other by cherishing the memories of the faces they shall never see. This is how the human soul triumphs over the odds.

We should also think about the "Blue Helmets" with bleeding hearts. More than 8,000 Bangladeshi servicemen are working in the UN Peacekeeping missions in various countries. Their gallant professionalism has elevated Bangladesh to the

second largest contributor of troops in such noble missions.

They are now in deep shock and their minds have been restless with grief. Yet unlike their colleagues at home, it has been painstakingly business as usual with the Bangladeshi Peacekeepers abroad. This has been extremely punishing.

The authorities may consider nominating special emissaries who may be sent on PM's instructions to the major Peacekeeping deployments. They may be chosen from either serving or retired senior army officers or former diplomats.

These emissaries will spend a few days with the Bangladesh Peacekeepers abroad. They will explain the measures the government has taken during and after the heinous act in Pilkhana. They will also update the mourning troops about the progress of prosecution. Above all, they will also offer personal counselling to comfort the soldiers in grief.

Lack of information sprouts misinformation, which creates the fume of confusion and mistrust. That is the last thing the nation needs, let alone its servicemen. These soldiers will be coming home upon ending respective assignments. Hearts and souls of these homebound warriors must not be heavy with the fog of improper notion.

The authorities may think about it.
Abu Saeed Khan
Cyberjaya, Kuala Lumpur

Education or discrimination?



Much has been written on the topic of the three-tier education system of our country. Broadly speaking, there are three types of education systems: the mainstream Bangla medium education for the middle class people, the madrassa education for the poor and the English medium schooling for the privileged people. It is said that this division in education adds to the rich-poor gap and sustains social inequality.

Bigotry, snobbery, fundamentalism--many of the ills that pervade the land can be traced back to this class-based education system. It can be said that we have hardly reformed our formal education system which was formulated by the British colonial masters.

As Bangladesh is now a free nation, it should give due emphasis on the question of education system. Otherwise, the gap between the classes will become wider and wider. And this may give rise to many socio-economic problems.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong