

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.

PM's speech



SHAIKH ISLAM KAJOL / DREAMWORKS

ment surround the general amnesty offered by the prime minister and the time that passed from the start of the mutiny to the surrender of the mutineers. A blame game started and it has disappointed many of those who hope for a united stand of our political leaders during a national crisis.

The speech that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina delivered to the nation on 26 February to make the mutineers agree to surrender was quite timely and wise. It was touchy, prudent and tough and forced everyone to behave sanely and not go beyond limits. It could be given only by a political leader who has been elected with a large mandate from people. During that time very few in the country wished a military solution to this crisis. People did not want to see a bloodbath and prayed for a political solution.

No one can guarantee that those who have been murdered could have been saved by the military action on the first day, but almost everyone guessed that the death toll would have risen far higher. Besides, there was tension also in other BDR camps across the country.

Now people want to see that the evil force behind this tragic incident is dragged into light.

Alamgir Khan
Associate Program Coordinator
Other Vision Communication
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Tragedy that has befallen people of Bangladesh in the guise of a mutiny staged by some BDR jawans has pushed the nation into a chasm of grief, confusion and disbelief. A few days after the smooth handover of power to a political government and restoration of parliamentary democracy, this incident has given rise to many questions, some of which are legitimate, some far-fetched and some misleading. Some questions that are coming up frequently from the opposition bench in parlia-

Port city

The descendants of the Portuguese are still to be seen in Chittagong. Most of them married local women and are known as Kala Firingis or Matia (earth coloured) Firingis. They are mostly Roman Catholic Christians. During the British period they enjoyed certain privileges and were given preference in appointments in certain institutions like the port and the railway and in clerical posts in government offices. An area in the city known as Firingi Bazar is said to be named after them. The most significant contribution of the Portuguese is the presence of many Portuguese words in the Bengali language which are in daily use till now. A few examples are - Anaras (pineapple), Pepe (papaya), Padri (clergyman), Fita (ribbon), Alpin (pin), botam (button), Chabi (key) etc.

Chittagong has been a seaport since ancient times. Arabs traded with the port from the 9th century AD. The Chittagong region was under the kingdom of Arakan during the sixth and seventh centuries. Before Muslim rule,

Chittagong had been either under the control of the Arakans or under the kings of Burma. Sultan Fakruddin Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon conquered Chittagong in 1340. The explorer Ibn Batuta passed through Chittagong during his travels. After the defeat of Sultan Ghyasuddin Mahmud Shah at the hands of Sher Shah Suri in 1538, the Arakanese again captured Chittagong. From this time onward until its conquest by the Mughals this region was under the control of the Portuguese and the Magh pirates.

The Mughal Commander Umeed Khan expelled the Portuguese from the area in 1666 and established Mughal rule there. The Mughals renamed Chittagong as Islamabad. The city was occupied by Burmese troops shortly in the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. During the period 1920-40, Chittagong became the main hub of revolutionary activities against the British Raj. The geographical position of Chittagong, on the south-east corner of a vast and scattered empire, made it ideal for such clandestine activities. The main mastermind of

these activities was Surya Sen, known to common people simply as 'Masterda'. After some minor attacks on the Raj, the revolutionaries took control of the town on 18 April 1930. The revolutionaries captured the Chittagong armoury under the leadership of Masterda. The Indian republic was proclaimed with Surya Sen as the first president. The revolutionaries, however, failed to isolate the city, and reinforcement came quickly to the British. After 3 days the British were once again in control of the city. The revolutionaries were scattered, yet their operations continued. Even after the arrest and execution of Masterda (in Jan. 1934), the activities continued. A number of women were also involved. The leaders of the women revolutionaries were Pritilata Waddadar, Bina Das, Lila Ray, and Kalpana Dutta, among others. Finally, during the early 40's, as the battle in the Far East became very intense, Chittagong became a vital component of the defence of British India. The regular presence of British Army and Navy in the town made it difficult for the revolu-

tionaries to carry on their activities. After more than two decades, Chittagong lost its revolutionary character.

In 1971, The Declaration of Independence of Bangladesh came from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra located at Kalurghat, Chittagong.

Peter Rebeiro
Indira Road, Dhaka

Foreign agents

Without any further delay all foreign spies and their local agents must be found and charge-sheeted for their involvement in the extra judicial killings starting with the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman & Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman up to the carnage at the BDR headquarters.

For the security of the country, we must identify and punish the foreign agents.
Golam Ashraf
Gulshan, Dhaka

A good book

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal's recent book titled "Muktijuddher Itihas" (History of The Liberation War), which was launched in this year's Ekushey Book Fair, is an excellent book. He has in brief written about the history of our liberation war in a way that would encourage young readers to read it with interest. He has focused on the division, discrimination, exploitation and conspiracies that Bengalis had to face from the Pakistani rulers and which ultimately led to the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan.

For instance, he wrote "75% of the budget was spent on West Pakistan and 25% on East Pakistan, even though 62% of the revenue income was from East Pakistan" (pg. 2; translated version by Yeshim Iqbal). In addition, when the Awami League won the Dec 7 (1970) general elections by an overwhelming majority, Pakistani rulers were taken by surprise and thus they started hatching conspiracies. And then after Bangabandhu's historic March 7 speech, the independence movement gained momentum.

At a time when our young generation is increasingly becoming unaware about the glorious past of our Liberation War, Zafar Iqbal's book gives us hope amidst the darkness. This book is surely going to help the young people to know about how we achieved this beloved motherland of ours. And since the book is written by a writer who is very popular among the young generation, I believe that this book will be widely read.
Wasif Wahed
One-mail

Bashundhara fire



PHOTO: STAR

Reading through the various newspaper reports; it seems that the failure of the sprinkler system is probably the main reason for the seriousness of the fire. It makes me recall my younger days, when I was responsible for the Khulna Newsprint Mills fire services on the technical side, (not fire-fighting) way back in early 1960s! The fire section there had its own fire engine, belonging to KNM!

The source of water was the nearby river; with two water pumps; one electric and one with diesel engine which fed into the emergency 10,000cft. reserve tank, dedicated to fire fighting only. This reserve tank had two high capacity pumps; one diesel and one electric; the reason being that for safety electricity had to be shut off as soon as there was a fire to eliminate the chance of electrical causes for fire.

This fed the sprinkler system and fire hydrants, with hose reels at various locations.

A further back up was an emergency diesel pump connected to the housing colony drinking water system having its own large reserve tank of drinking water, isolated from the mills. Water from this large reserve was available if needed. It could also feed the fire hydrant system. When large quantity of water was needed for fire fighting; it could automatically start the underground submersible pump of the tube well; as soon as water level in the reserve drinking water tank reached a pre-set level. As further safety, the electric supply for the colonies could be instantly separate from the mills, and connected to the public electric supply as needed.

Dry paper area, starting from the

paper machine dryers all had a number of sprinklers on the roof, with fusible plugs; which melted at around 70deg.C and spray water and set off audible alarm as the sprinkler header pressure became lower!

We had to test the pumps every month; and the sprinkler system maybe quarterly, if I remember. But one thing was for sure; any negligence in fire fighting operating equipment called for instant dismissal! Also it was mandatory that the diesel pumps started at the first push of the starter button; otherwise there was hell to pay! The term "You are fired" was a reality in those days in KNM, under Sandwell management; applicable equally to expatriate or local personnel!

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Soul searching

I'd been a coward... I kept thinking what would people say. What would my friends say? What if they don't agree with me. Now, its high time I voice it out, if I don't write now, if I don't voice it now, may be it's not worth being flesh and blood. May be I'll lead a life of something I despise the most, a jellyfish - a creature with no spine.

For once, let's forget every reason, political, logical, ethical, every reason that you may come up with and think about the basics. I can only think of one word, massacre. Bloodshed is an understatement if we compare the event that took place in February 2009.

I'd been a proud Bangladeshi. Growing up, I'd heard stories of revolution for language, revolution for soil, the daring people of all ages, gender and classes who participated in our liberation war. Independence rang the date 25th March, rather than 26th for me, because I always envisioned the torture my people went through. I always wished that I were born then, so that I could've joined the war to avenge the mass murder. For years, I've retained a grudge against the Pakistanis until one day I came to realise, it's not worth it to hate an entire nation, when it was the fault of the ruling class.

Now that the children are orphaned, now that their thirst for blood is quenched, now the investigation starts. What would be the point exactly? This issue will be used by the opposition, the government to blame each other.

The biggest fault is within us. Before pinpointing anyone, I would point out myself. I am a Bangladeshi and I abuse my rights myself. I bribe, I bootlick powers for my own benefit, I support power and not ethics, I criticise our own real intellectuals, I am indifferent to my neighbours' well-being, I smile at someone's success like a hypocrite and squirm inside with jealousy.

"Where are you from?" I hesitate before I reply "B...Bangladesh", and I'm ashamed as I remember February 2009.
Anika Tasnim Hafiz
Adelaide
South Australia

Tall building on fire

Spending the afternoon watching the shocking live footage of yet another tragedy befalling us, I can only wonder what the enquiries will conclude, and what comes next?

I was cheering when I saw our intrepid armed forces coming to the rescue and plucking one man off the roof of the building in their helicopter, thereby surely saving his life. After all they have been through, they still come through for us.

In the meantime, I heard a purported Vice Chairman of the Bashundhara Group being interviewed on air, when he was asked whether they were satisfied at all the measures that had been taken to secure the building. The first thing he said was that, of course, the authorities do not have the facilities to fight a fire in buildings of this size. This begs the question: If that is so, why do you build such buildings and put the shopping public and office workers at such risk in the event of a catastrophe such as this? Was there a sprinkler system in place, since other facilities would not be available?

Constructing such an edifice, knowing that the authorities do not have the infrastructure to provide for an event such as that which has just transpired, is like sending the Titanic on its maiden voyage knowing that there were not enough lifeboats to carry all its passengers.

Syed Hamde Ali
The Nawab Palace
Bogra

Hopes dashed

It just seems a split second ago our country was on the brink of a radical change. The ambience was of great optimism. And the wind of change was blowing which generated a fervent aspiration. Now, barely three months have passed, and it's all chaotic. The government has plunged into a tumultuous situation which promises no end. After listening to all the biased and unbiased comments of numerous people nationwide, a question triggers one's thoughts. Was it their fault? We are in the midst of an atrocious and wicked world where people are killing their brothers. The cause behind this hazardous situation is one simple thing animosity. In

adverse circumstances, we human beings are so carried away by our anger that we tend to transgress the regulations of plain rationality.

We really need to be cautious in the decisive steps we take to ensure a prosperous Bangladesh.

Waheedur Rahman
Manarat Dhaka Int'l College
Baridhara DOHS, Dhaka

Punish the oppressors

The other day my friend Binod Mangsang was reading a Bangla newspaper. At one stage he got stuck up at a heading, it read "Amar Meyeke Bachan, Baba" (Save my daughter). I became curious at that and went through the report. To my utter dismay, I came to know that a woman named Champa Khatun had been barbarously tortured by her husband's family.

Every day when we open newspapers we see many reports related to acid violence, dowry, rape etc. that are going on unabated in the country. The way Champa has been tortured is sheer medieval.

So, let us be united and fight against the oppressors of women.

Rasel Raymond Dio
Aseminarian
Bhatikar, Mymensingh

Media coverage

The media is the main outlet through which people receive information. With the passage of time, getting news from every corner of the world has become easy. The electronic media is showing us what is happening throughout the world within a very short period of time. The media defeats autocracy and conquers humanity! It destroys root of injustice. While the media is to be used for serving humanity, we sometimes feel that in some cases it remains silent.

During the Mumbai attack 200 people died. The entire world was aroused by the media coverage as if Mumbai were the whole world. It was of course the right response. But so far Israeli butchers have killed thousands of Palestinians including children and women. The media coverage of this genocide is not that wide as it is in other cases.

The media should be neutral!
Tamanna Ferdous Munni
Dept of English
International Islamic
University Chittagong (IIUC)

Spring and our miseries

With the advent of spring, we have to face a myriad of problems in our day-to-day life. In other words, we are hard put because of the scarcity of water, to speak nothing about the other problems that continue to plague urban life. As we wake up in the morning, and turn on the tap, we find that there is no water. Sometimes several drops of water trickle down, augmenting our vexation.

A beeline of people in front of public taps; this has become a common sight of the cityscape. Again, there is the pungent stink in the water supplied by Wasa of the capital city. As regards the water supplied by Wasa of the port city, the people of different localities complain about the salinity that continues to climb with the progress of the dry season.

All said and done, the situation calls for remedial action on the part of the authorities concerned. Although there is a huge gap between the supply and demand, they should see to it that the city dwellers get the necessary amount of water.

Zabed Wali
Pahartali, Chittagong

Let's change

The other day I was travelling in a bus on my way back home from Agrabad to GEC circle. The bus was horribly jam-packed as there wasn't any tiny space left. At that moment, a young woman was struggling to keep balance as the people were rushing inside the bus to have a better position. I was surprised to see none around the woman showing any kind of respect for her. So, I decided to give my own seat to her. But to my utter surprise a burst of laughter came out from my right side where a group of young people were sitting and exchanging dirty jokes with each other. I was puzzled for a while as though I had committed a sin by giving my seat to that woman.

My question is, when will we be civilized and sensitive enough to respect our own mothers and sisters?
Md. Anisuzzaman Sarker
MBA, Finance
University of Chittagong

A second runway?

Finally, the government of Bangladesh woke up after 29 years. Zia International Airport is probably going to see the 2nd runway though it was there in the original master plan during the construction of the then mini terminal building and the airport which now handles 400 flights a week which is on an average 57 flights a day.

The new runway if built should be offering a lot of additional facilities befitting an international airport, especially during any emergency when a runway goes inoperative.

It is learnt a committee headed by a senior member of Caab administration has been formed who will submit a feasibility report as soon as their scrutiny of and sifting through the relevant data is done. The present airport certainly has changed a lot as far as the terminal area is concerned but the space for building a second runway was there for the last 29 years but the only obstacle we see for building the runway is Uttara RA, on the northern part and Nikunjo on the southern part along with some high-rise buildings on the south-eastern part of the only International Airport we have in Dhaka.

There are the areas which may become an obstacle for a smooth and safe take off and landing plus security to the airborne aircraft. The question is when and how soon these structure will be removed and the bigger question



is that the land & building owners need to be compensated at the present value of their respective properties at a time so that they find a new place for their accommodation. The land/building owners are not guilty of making buildings and homes as I believe they have necessary documents obtained from Rajuk.

The airport which has a two miles long runway with 03 taxiways was in dire need for a second runway starting from the 1990s when the number of flights started to increase along with bigger aircraft every year.

Having two runways certainly will be very helpful, especially at times of emergency when the runway in use has to be shut down, which we have seen many times.

If at all this runway is built, the Caab authorities along with the supervision of the government have to improve and install the in-

house facilities of the airport which I am not going to elaborate as a few articles as well as letters were published in the DS on this matter. The house keeping of the airport needs to improve dramatically. In today's modern era, the airport is considered the gateway to the country and the person who is arriving for the first time in Bangladesh does get the impression how dirty we are as a nation as soon he/she lands his/her feet into the boarding bridge.

However, the government should think twice before making the second runway and spending all the money if they are to keep the airport at this present location as we understand that before the elections both the big parties informed us that they would shift the airport to another location.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi
Dhaka