

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.

Obama's peace initiative



PHOTO: AP

Obama's peace initiative taking off from Cairo is a most welcome endeavour. I am confident that he will succeed in overcoming Bush's bullishness, folly and misguided concept of the "gang of evil" indoctrinated by the Jewish-Conservative destructive groups that tutored Bush all the way. It may be a difficult job to make a 180 degree turn-around; given the Conservatives' short sighted war mongering basis that created the misery of Iraq and Afghanistan, and is now targeted on Iran! I am sure everyone will join me in wishing Obama God-Speed in his praiseworthy effort to usher in world peace, given his heredity.

Hopefully, Obama's genes is a synthesis of all things good of the Christian and Muslim religions; both having historical roots in the Middle East; today's potential hot spot in the world! Forgetting historical hatred and suspicions, of the days long gone by, between the "Peoples of the Book".

Hopefully, Obama will succeed in his excellent effort of bringing together the Jews, Christians and Muslims. It will be the greatest feat in bringing peace on Earth! Once religious understanding and the goodness of common values between these three religions is established and accepted; the path towards political understanding should not be far away! Ignoring history, can we not dream and proceed forward on the basis that "The past is all lies, the present the truth and the future a dream"?

It is up to us that we transform our past historical misunderstandings into a future of goodwill and fellowship in our overall interest of a conflict free world! We owe it to our future generation, that we take the first step in this very right and proper direction. This endeavour is probably more important than conquering space. Let us bring peace on Earth; before we venture into exploring unknown civilisations in the galaxy of stars and planets; for a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. It will be the greatest service to the world; since mankind inhabited this planet in pre-historic era!

I wonder why we the successors of three historic tribes of Middle East (Jews, Christians and Muslims); all the creations of Allah, cannot find a common ground for peaceful co-existence? I only wonder if this pious and basic desire can be realised in our lifetime! Let us all pray and hope for the best, and wish Obama God-Speed in his epoch making journey in quest of peace on earth. I pray that Obama successfully exercises his position of power and authority to try and undo the unnecessary misunderstanding among these three religions.

May Allah bless him and help him in this holy task to reunite the three.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Rivers and our existence

Thanks to my favourite newspaper "The Daily Star" for launching a WAR against the polluters and grabbers of the rivers surrounding the Dhaka city. My sincere tributes to the Editor, Pinaki Roy and Morshed Ali Khan for taking such a bold step with a firm commitment to winning the WAR. My sincere thanks also to the Channel I authorities, particularly Faridur Reza Sagar and S. Siraj and other print and electronic media that have supported our continuous movement to bring it up to the latest form of a WAR designed by The Daily Star and Channel I.

We from the tinny organisation Sunder Jiban and then from Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (BAPA) have been continuously fighting to save the rivers surrounding the Dhaka city and elsewhere in the country. "Buriganga Banchao Andolan" by BAPA with the leadership of Professor Muzaffar Ahmed and Sunder Jiban has been vocal against the polluters and grabbers of Buriganga, Turag, Shitalakhya and Balu for about a decade. Under the leadership of Professor Ahmed and Dr. Matin, BAPA's movement has also been spread all over the country to save each and every river from the clutches of polluters and grabbers and also from our mighty neighbour India which is responsible for the death of many of our rivers due to construction of dams upstream on more or less 54 rivers, including Farakka on the Ganges. They are now planning to construct another dam on the river Borak at Tipaimukh which will be a serious threat to our Meghna and Kushiara. Though the WAR that The Daily Star and Channel I has started is late, but late is always better than never. And this WAR should continue to reclaim all other rivers of the country.

The water of Buriganga, Turag, Shitalakhya and Balu can no longer be treated as it is stated in a series of reports published in The Daily Star in the last couple of weeks.

Three major things are killing our rivers. First is pollution, second is siltation and the third is encroachment. About 230 rivers of our country, including 57 international rivers, carry 1.7 to 2.00 billion tons of silt every year. All these 230 rivers in Bangladesh are tributaries of the 57 international rivers, all from the upper riparian countries i.e. Nepal and India. Our great river Padma and its branches, like Madhumati, Arialkha, Dhaleshwari, etc. are quickly losing their flow due to the Farakka Barrage. Following the control of water by India through Farakka and other barrages on 54 rivers, they have lost their flow of current, and silt is depositing on their beds as a result of which new shoals are emerging, and ultimately, the rivers are dying.

Encroachment of river is another main cause of river death. This is particularly true in case of rivers surrounding major cities, especially the rivers surrounding the Dhaka city. We have four important rivers surrounding Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Tongi. These are Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Turag and Balu, and all these rivers are quickly

dying because of encroachment by political and social stalwarts, influential organisations and unscrupulous people. Most of these rivers have been so squeezed and narrowed that they have lost their navigability and so communication through them has become risky. Many of them have been narrowed down to 20-30 feet or even less.

We have learnt that the prime minister has made a firm commitment to save the rivers surrounding Dhaka city and eviction of grabbers has already started. We want to see the implementation of the prime minister's decision and our demand of not only evicting the grabbers, but also the polluters, and not only from the rivers surrounding Dhaka city but also from all the rivers of the country.

M. Sirajul Islam Molla
Dhaka

After-effects of political culture

Our glib politicians never talk about the negative cumulative after-effects (the other side of the coin) of our political culture on our 'developing' society; which now lacks morals and morale. We are water buckets with leaking holes! Political sanitation standards stink!

How much political silt we have collected during the last few decades! Nature imitates: look at the rivers and water bodies around greater Dhaka! We seem to revel in 'Sewerage Politics'! We need political effluent plants not available anywhere in the world!

The local political Tutorial Centres are there; but these are cleverly polarized; and admission is restricted. No spiritual journeys for wayward political leaders; anywhere in the world (it is secular)!

As a senior citizen, I'd like to see efficient governance working quietly in the background --- like the way we breathe; and how mothers work quietly and routinely in the background looking after the children and the home. Why our parliamentarians are so noisy outdoors? It is reflected in the noise level in capital Dhaka. Why are the JS proceedings so boring?

Now we are world leaders in environmental pollution (besides being the most corrupt)! Negatively, we are superlative! Hello, out there: are you listening?

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

TV ads

There has been a revolutionary change in the commercial TV ads in Bangladesh. To keep pace with the competition, companies have adopted new marketing and promotional strategies which changed the advertising tactics. But companies do what is good for their exposure, which should not be the sole purpose of advertising. If we talk about business and marketing ethics then companies should promote their message to the consumers in a way that don't breach the consumer rights. But what we are watching in the TV's today, are not appreciable. Many well-known companies are broadcasting not only deceptive but also sometimes disturbing and obscene commercial ads. I don't want to mention the names but I think the people concerned will recognize

Tipaimukh barrage



A.M. AHAD / DRINKNEWS

Our motherland has been turning into a desert over the years, due to the river linkage programmes of India that started off with the Farakka Barrage. We have got some international rivers in our country. Most of these rivers crisscrossed millions of acres of land in India before their arrival in Bangladesh. Both Bangladesh and India have equal rights over the waters of these rivers. But, ignoring the rights of Bangladesh, India has been constructing barrages on many river systems. In the past, India diverted water from the Padma and the Tista by constructing dams in their Indian parts. The hinterland of the two mighty rivers has turned barren for want of water.

Now the Tipaimukh barrage is another death trap for Bangladesh. If India goes on with this project, the Meghna -- Surma river systems will be reduced into mere brooks. It will cast a gloomy spell over the whole Sylhet region. By affecting agricultural yield, navigability and industrial establishments downstream, the Tipaimukh barrage will pose a great threat to achieving our millennium development goals. The government must protest any unwanted and hegemonic steps by India through diplomatic channels.

Mostafa Kamal Molla
Dept. of English
Hazi Muhsin Hall
University of Dhaka

Rupsha-Bagerhat train

The narrow gauge railway train services between Khulna and Bagerhat via Rupsha River were in operation for over 100 years. But the railway services were closed with the removal of railway tracks a decade back. In the past, bus services were available during the dry winter season using the muddy 'district board' road. After liberation, an all weather road was built leading to introduction of minibus services which is the lone communication mode today. It is needless to narrate the difficulties for the travelling public, especially the children, elderly people, ladies, sick etc.

The prime minister got elected twice from Bagerhat and thus people expect re-introduction of railway services between Bagerhat and Rupsha.

Mahbubur Rahman
Dasani
Bagerhat

Black smoke

Some days back roads and highways were seriously polluted with black smoke released by the vehicles. Following introduction of gas driven vehicles, this pollution was reduced significantly. But now black smoke has entered into the homes as many residential houses and factories are frequently using diesel generators during load shedding hours. This black smoke produced by the generators is becoming a major threat to public health and environment.

I think some measures to contain this pollution should be adopted on an urgent basis.

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural
Extension & Information
System
SAU, Dhaka

Another sore point!

The ties between Bangladesh and India have not been so remarkable over the years, except during the 1971 war-time. We have to acknowledge that Indians wholeheartedly extended a helping hand then. But over the years, due to India's big brotherly attitude and anti-Indian propaganda at home, the bilateral relations have been soured.

The Tipaimukh dam has turned out to be another sore point.

We hope the two governments will resolve everything in the spirit of good neighbourliness.

Md Zonae Emran
Dept of Political Science
University of Dhaka

Extortionists at work

As a developing country, we need to create a congenial atmosphere for the growth of trade and commerce. Recently, a number of armed gangs of extortionists have started to threaten the industrialists and business personalities. Business entrepreneurs are receiving phone calls from those criminals with demands for huge sums of money, even from outside the country. People involved in real estate business have also been targeted by them. The godfathers are always staying behind the curtains. All the business people and industrialists have expressed their anxiety as they cannot carry on their business at the cost of their lives. Those criminals must be traced down and stopped.

S.M. Shamim-Ur-Rashid
Tushar
Department of Business
Administration
Shahjalal University, Sylhet

Natural gas

The justified access, use and distribution of a national wealth are a right that every citizen of a country should share & benefit from. Although it is very difficult to arrange and practice such things, especially in the developing countries, there is no harm in using some paper and ink in at least letting the people know about the privileges that they are entitled to.

Natural gas is our national asset which every citizen has the right to share. However, its utilization in the form of CNG by cars and jeeps at a throw away price particularly by the upper class of our society is a very common picture in our capital. Speaking of this issue, many might point out the various constraints in distributing this precious resource of our country equally to all the citizens. But this in no way means that it is to be consumed to a large extent by a particular section in the form of CNG in their vehicles.

None can deny the usefulness of CNG and its friendliness towards our environment. But the price that is being offered is not justified if we consider the fact that a huge portion of this precious natural gas is being consumed by only a small section of our privileged population, leaving others out. Better utilization of this resource to generate electricity and manufacturing of petrochemical products

would be of greater benefit to the mass population. Moreover, the throw away price of CNG is encouraging many to have their own vehicles, especially in the capital and in other divisional headquarters, as they know that they can roam the whole of a city in at a cost of only 100 bucks if they use CNG. It will not only affect negatively the use of natural gas in the form of CNG at a cheap price but will also cram our capital city with ever grueling traffic jam. If required, the government can limit the use of CNG to private vehicles by introducing Special Electronic Cards that would allow the private vehicle owners to refuel their transports with CNG for a certain number of times in a month.

It is time for the government to take necessary steps to cut the use of this asset in the form of CNG at a negligible price and at the same time the government must ensure its proper distribution across the country. If not, they must at least guarantee the justified price of gas.

Zahid A. Choudhury
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Educate people

Right after the end of the caretaker government's rule, Bangladesh is seeing all dormant evils coming to life! Thugs and muggers are active again, killing businessmen and even students.

Only a few months ago we saw the rise of devils and demons who let their evil side of the mind take over them and they went on killing and molesting our own people on February 25 at Pilkhana.

Why all this? This is because people are not rightly educated. The good side of the brain is not emancipated and the bad side is controlling the mind, resulting in satanic acts.

The only solution to stop this is education, the right kind of education of the mind. N.G. Chaudhury
Luxembourg

"Nodi Bachao, Dhaka Bachao"

Even a few days ago it was not possible to realize that our dying rivers could be saved. But we hope now that the rivers can be reclaimed. So I feel obliged to say that such consciousness among the general people, even the illegal occupants and the government, has come

because of the role played by the press.

We hope the campaign to save the rivers will not lose its momentum before the target is achieved.

Mostafa Al Mahmud
(Mamun)

Humanities Group
Dhaka College, Dhaka

Khaleda Zia's statements

I wrote a similar letter on the subject of DS editorial under the headline "Politicians and people" which was printed on Monday, June 1, 2009. I wholeheartedly appreciate your advice to the leader of the opposition. Begum Khaleda Zia was, in fact, caught unawares and she could not believe and is still unable to digest the 29 Dec election results.

The advice is good but it will not work unless the print media helps it to work. When newspapers print her statement they should always point out that she said something "without evidences". I believe this word "without" will help people to understand that she said that ...but without any credible evidence.

This will work like magic and people will understand what is right or wrong.

All her endeavours to stay in power have failed. Her future political career is at stake, her party is in disarray. I believe she is trying to regain her lost image through making statements that are not based on ground reality.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

Polythene bags



MONIR UZZAMAN / DRINKNEWS

In the past, people used to go to bazaars with big baskets. "Thonga" -- a bowl shaped paper container in different sizes -- was also being used extensively. But 20-25 years ago polythene bags started entering into shops. They are very light, cheap and comfortable, no doubt. But as it has some elements which cannot be wasted or destroyed, drains, canals etc were blocked. Now there are ten feet polythene layers on the bed of the Buriganga and it is one of the main reasons for the death of this important river.

The last BNP government took a praiseworthy step it banned the polythene bags and enacted rules against manufacturing, selling and using it.

People including environmentalists applauded this decision and polythene bags went out of sight. The authorities tried to popularise the bags made of jute, cloth and paper. But as jute and cloth bags are not durable in nature, those did not become an ideal alternative. In fact, there has been no identical thing like polythene bag in markets as yet.

In the meantime, manufacturers of polythene bags have become active and again our shops and markets are flooded with such harmful bags. We do not feel any sense of guilt or sin to take things in those bags.

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka