

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.

Wastage of power

As citizens of Bangladesh, we are going through numerous miseries and obviously it is to the authorities we turn to for the abatement of these miseries. But as individuals and as groups of responsible members of society, isn't there a lot that we can actually do, too?

In these times of acute shortage of electricity, water and gas, can't we exercise a little restraint and prudence and try to conserve some of these natural resources?

Why do light-shade shops and jeweler stores (and there are so many of them!) have to keep all the lights on all evening? Can't they switch on the lights when a customer wants to look at something? Most of the time there are no customers, yet the shops are aglow with bright, powerful lights!

Until the situation improves, can't

the government impose a restriction on illumination in public places? Clubs and restaurants can be made to close a little earlier. The govt. and the public can jointly find some sensible solutions to reduce the sufferings. Let us start by getting rid of some of those unnecessary lights!

Students are unable to study due to the horrendous load shedding. Which is more important? Students doing well in the exams, or our having malls, clubs, private parties, etc, dazzling with lights?

Consumerism has reached such a high level, it is making us shallow and insensitive to real issues. Let us focus on simple, but comfortable living. Let's do away with the glitz and try to live a decent life.

Nausheen Rahman
Baridhara, Dhaka



WAHID ADNAM / DRINKNEWS

Religion and we

In any confrontation between the great religions of the world, it is important for the participants to find the sort of language that avoids abuse and prejudice so that disagreements do not become battlegrounds and true debate may forward the kind of relationships that can heal wounds, create understanding and not feel threatened by the 'straight' talking that can spur us to correct our own faults. The world is waiting impatiently for the religions 'to get their act together' so that they - and, indeed, all people of goodwill - can discover how to work together for justice and peace in the smallest villages and the highest courts of nations.

However, there is some language that does not help in this process. Think of 'extremists' and 'fundamentalists'. All of us, surely, want to be 'extremely' or 'fundamentally' right rather than wrong. Taking the image of the washing line, most religions have a variety of choices, about precisely where to peg our identity, at least to be going on with. However, there is a point at which some people fall off the end of the washing line and what words do we use to describe them?

We can find the words to communicate with the truly religious but conducting a debate with those who are going off the rails is much harder. We must try because, when religious people go badly wrong, things can get extremely dangerous. They can become self-righteous, humourless and paranoid, separate into squabbling sects, dominate the gullible, wound the vulnerable, reject scholarship and use the techniques of 'brainwashing' to persuade (usually) the young to destroy their own and others' lives. We all have them - or have had them in our histories. However, we must go on believing that, even for them and their victims, salvation is possible and so we must use language to plead, encourage and negotiate with them to shift them from where they are to where they should be - back onto the washing line, free to choose a place between the tolerable parameters of orthodoxy where they can repent, heal and mature.... but what language is that?

The words 'conservative' and 'liberal' are also stale and overused. Of course we want to 'conserve' all that is good about the past and its traditions and want to celebrate that 'liberalism' that is the generosity of spirit that most of our saints bear witness to -

but what words can replace these?

It is even hard to find the right words for the balanced, intelligent and devout practice of the religions, the way celebrated by our great scholars, poets and teachers. The language of 'moderation' can be so boring! The right practice of religion should, surely, stir the blood and inspire the soul.

Angela Robinson
Gulshan, Dhaka

Chrome-free leather tanning!

An important and revealing front-page article on the subject was published in a local English daily on 18 April, which should be of interest to the environment protectors and owners of tanneries. It was reported that most tannery owners were reluctant to adopt this safe and interesting new development in leather tanning from BCSIR. The authorities should call the tannery owners and explain the advantages of this process. They should give them a simple and easy written pamphlet; if necessary with sketches, and cost and other savings, explaining and describing the new tanning process.

This is the best way to convince the tanneries, since they are set in their proven ways, and normally reluctant to change. Also, BCSIR should train the concerned tannery owners and technicians on how to do the tanning with the new chemical instead of the one they now use. This sort of mutual bilateral interaction will be useful in convincing the tannery owners in a positive manner. After all, changing an established process needs understanding and it should be convincing for the users.

The prospective users must be told and shown that using the new chemical, in no way deteriorates the quality of yield of finished tanned leather!

The important fact of preventing skin and other infections and diseases because of using chromium salts in tanning must be explained to the workers.

The crux of the issue is 'operating costs' for the changed process. One positive step will be to offer lower import duty and taxes, if the new chemical is to be imported, compared to the chromium compounds now in use; so that specific cost per unit area of leather is reduced. This will be the catalyst as all manufacturers consider seriously any idea of cost reduction.

Engr. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Drug abuse

Nowadays, drug addiction is one of the main problems of the young generation in this country, especially on university campuses. The availability of drug is increasing day by day which is really worrisome.

The problem is becoming acute. We should organise a social movement against drug abuse.

Apu
Bangladesh Agricultural University
Mymensingh

Rutted roads

Decay has got the better of the roads at Nikunja-2 in Khilkhet residential area through lack of repair work over the years. Almost all the roads are in bad shape, causing daily sufferings to the residents. Even with a little rain all the roads get clogged with rainwater as it is one of the low land areas in Dhaka city. Of all the shabby roads, many are seen as drains owing to stagnant, smelly, polluted water on the roads, especially in the rainy season. During the rainy season all the roads remain water-logged and roads get muddier and slippery very badly. The most distressful thing is that with the aggravated situation of the roads, many rickshaw pullers show reluctance to pull their rickshaw wading through these rutted roads. Even sometimes many cars get bogged down in the middle of the road because of the holes created there. There are many official and student residents living in this area who are the worst sufferers. Apart from this, we have to wait for a long time to get a rickshaw which is a pretty time consuming and monotonous job.

Thinking this city as capital of Bangladesh, sometimes we get ashamed of its mismanagement and careless supervision of the authorities concerned. If we think from the standpoint of a foreign tourist, then definitely one can think that if the capital is like this then what will be the condition of its other parts. Actually, our authorities concerned seem to be blind and indiscreet in their responsibility and accountability. No special improvement exhibits physically which can make us believe that really our country is heading towards prosperity. Where does all the money collected from the so-called venal politicians go? Can't it be used for all the worn-torn roads in our country?

I would earnestly request the authorities concerned to take some necessary steps for Nikunja-2 area for the repair of all the battered roads.

Hasnat
On behalf of Nikunja-2 inhabitants
Nikunja-2, Khilkhet, Dhaka

Future of Bangla

In his letter "Indians honoured" (23 April), Prof. M. Zahidul Haque has appropriately stated that selection of "Jana gana mana..." by the UNESCO as the world's best national anthem is not only an honour for Indians, but for all Bangla speakers of the globe. Prof. Haque has also requested the Indian government to attach more importance to the expansion and learning of Bangla. But how can it be expected that New Delhi would pay heed to his request and act likewise when the Bengalis of West Bengal and the rest of India are themselves working overtime to shed off their Bangaliyana?

Actually Bengalis of India are victims of a supreme inferiority complex.

Thus it is seen that in all spheres of life, Bengalis are consciously discarding their cultural distinctiveness and imitating the styles of Hindi India and English West. This suicidal trend is being reflected in their dress and food habits, their culture and even vocabulary. The obscenities of Hindi film music and the violence and bloodshed of Bollywood films have knocked out Rabindra Sangeet and the artistic excellence of Ray and found a permanent place in Bengali hearts. Bengalis have participated in a mad race for Hindicising and Anglicising its own community and are determined to forget all its Bengaliness.

It is well known that when a community loses its self-respect and becomes indifferent to its own language, culture and tradition, its doom is not far off. Just for this reason, Bengalis in India are heading for a catastrophe. If the Bengalis had really taken pride in their identity and culture, this day would not have arisen.

They choose not to raise their voices when announcements in Bengali are terminated in certain railway stations of West Bengal or when the Metro Railway of Kolkata is hijacked by the Hindi promoters. Bengalis are also shameless enough to mob a rising Bollywood star whilst forgetting the irreparable loss of a legend, Kanika Bandopadhyay, the same day. Despite being termed the sweetest language of the earth by the UNESCO, Indian Bengalis feel ashamed to speak in Bangla. Unless the Bengalis regain their self-respect and learn to become united, the future of the community and their culture stand doomed in West Bengal.

However, the only consolation

is that Bangla will not completely vanish from the face of the earth as it will remain alive and well in Bangladesh -- the country of proud, brave and honourable Bengalis who fought against Urdu-imperialism and accorded Bangla its due right and honour in its own soil.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata, India

Proposed new airport

It is really good news for the people who reside in Dhaka. As we see now, living in Dhaka is becoming extremely horrible with traffic jam, population hike, and without electricity. Decentralization is the most fruitful solution that could be done by the government right now in a short period of time. With good long range planning, it could be one of the best decisions that a government could ever take. However, the government should take care of the people who are currently living in that proposed area.

About the name of the airport, I don't understand why the people of my beloved country are so stupid. Can't they just name the airport "Dhaka International Airport"? I have traveled through lots of airports in the USA and Canada. Most of them are based on the place name. Can't we leave Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Mr. Ziaur Rahman in their graves in peace? They have done so much for our country.

Audree
Alberta, Canada

Hisbut Tahrir

While the civilized educated people in the world are relentlessly working to invent medicines to cure incurable diseases like cancer, diabetes, liver ailment etc., while some are working to invent instruments like lasers beams and thinnest needles to reduce sufferings from injections for ailing people, while new and new instruments are being invented to contact people from one corner to another of this planet, while people are working to help people to live long with the help of their modern inventions, a certain group of people of the same planet are killing their fellow brethren inside prayer houses, making deadly weapons to throw on others of their own clan, inciting quarrels among themselves, trading on religion, exploiting others in the name of religion.

They preach and teach some unfounded theories in the name of the great religion

Lagging behind

Ten years ago, world leaders agreed at the UN on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 8 goals to significantly reduce extreme poverty, disease and illiteracy by 2015. World leaders met to take stock of progress at the mid-point. The first nine years have seen some important successes at the aggregate level, 40 million more children are in school, hundreds of millions of people have come out of extreme poverty, some deadly diseases like tuberculosis and measles have been contained, and fewer people are dying from HIV/AIDS. But the UN Secretary General warned that if the world has to meet the MDGs by 2015, the speed of implementation needs to be substantially accelerated. Paradoxically, foreign aid levels have actually fallen in the last four years and some of the richest countries are cutting back even further. It is no surprise then that virtually every leader from a developing country spoke during the summit about rich countries breaking their aid promises to the poor with the consequence being schools and health centres left without staff and equipment.

But turn our attention to the street conversation from Dhaka to Dakar, from Manila to Mexico City and we shall hear a different discourse on why the MDGs are not being met. For the poorest people living in rural Africa or Asia or the sprawling slums of Latin American cities, their daily experience is of being powerless in



QUDDUS ALAM / DRINKNEWS

the face of being denied basic public services.

I would like to add the quote from our Nobel Laureate -- Dr. Muhammad Yunus told the right word: "I was teaching in one of the universities while the country was suffering from a severe famine. People were dying of hunger, and I felt very helpless. As an economist, I had no tool in my toolbox to fix that kind of situation. In fact, solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results."

Gopal Sengupta
Canada

of Islam. They are of two colours, their outside is clean with religious outfits and is pious looking but inside is just the opposite. They have already earned bad name for Islam.

In Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia they have succeeded quite a lot. Their eyes are now on Bangladesh. The agents of this group have already stepped in here.

Hisbut Tahrir is one of such groups who are actively working here. Some local agents are sheltering them, helping them recruit members. Some political parties are behind them and giving all out support. The elite force Rab has already apprehended some of their members in the recent days.

Time has come to give qualitative education to our children. Our children should be taught the religion

correctly and side by side they have to acquire modern education.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

Revenue income and expenditures

Our government's revenue income is small and revenue expenditure is colossal. We do not cut our coat according to our cloth. We take more foreign loans every year at the cost of our people.

We observe and find lavish and luxuriant expenditures on the following matters without any accountability and transparency:-

i) Purchase, repair, maintenance and POL of government transports, payment of salary and overtime allowance to car drivers. There is rampant misuse of govt. transports, fictitious and false entries in the Car Log Books.

ii) Frequent tours of ministers and top govt officials to foreign countries without any significant result, political, economic and financial benefit or gain.

iii) Installations of air-conditioners, electric generators and IPS in the offices and residential houses of ministers and top govt. officials. Payment of a huge amount of electricity and telephone bills from our public exchequer.

We feel and humbly request our political leaders, irrespective of govt. and opposition, top govt officials, VIPs and all rich persons to observe austerity, keeping in mind the socio-economic condition and poor standard of living of our majority people.

O.H. Kabir
Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka

Satellite towns around Dhaka

The regime's latest decision to build four satellite towns around capital Dhaka needs to be reviewed, based on long-term effects.

Even today Dhaka's infrastructure cannot support the existing daily overloads. The metropolis is dying, slowly and surely; and the situation is already beyond control. Dhaka city is surrounded by low wetlands. Reduce Dhaka's floating population.

The road and inland waterways sectors are utterly inadequate to meet today's rising demands; not to speak of the additional requirements of the satellite towns. In an LDC, sky rail and underground systems

are economically and technically at risk (huge task for imported maintenance materials run by under-trained and insufficient staff).

What is needed is decentralisation of power from Dhaka to the divisional and district HQs. The MPs misuse too much power and influence with the result that other players do not get enough footprint to make some national contribution (the UZ chairmen are unhappy).

Bangladesh is one of the highest densities of population (per sq Km) in the world, in a relatively very small deltaic space. Roads, bridges, and culverts are not enough for mobility, without developing the IWT sector (we are not yet an industrialised nation). We have enough human resources to take up the extra loads of leadership at the lower levels in the different professional fields (we do not have enough graduate nurses; and the doctors do not like to serve in the rural areas).

More one-stop public service centres are required at the district and thana levels; instead of rushing to Dhaka for small errands all the time. Mega cities should have mega facilities, while democracy demands decentralisation of power. The rural-urban marketing network is weak and the cooperatives have proved to be corrupt. With concentration of power in fewer upper hands, the rich become richer, and the poor become poorer, tarnishing the political regime's public image about neutral management and administration.

The farmers work hard and honestly. They should have a place in society. The background role of women is appreciated officially. Satellite towns around Dhaka are not essential.

Alif Zabr, Dhaka

Herbal healing

Here and there in the Dhaka city we see massive advertisements of some herbal treatment centres and also get pamphlets of such advertisements in bus stops. These advertisements claim to cure with guarantee sexual dysfunction, asthma etc. even within seven days!

The language used in the advertisements is vulgar. The law enforcers should look into the matter.

Pradyut Kumar Saha
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Vulnerable city



AMADUL HQI / DRINKNEWS

The city is not safe at all. The city is not safe in case of a moderate quake, let alone a severe one. Only a magnitude-7 quake may damage Dhaka city entirely.

Recently, Haiti was damaged fully. Even the buildings of the president and the prime minister could not escape the quake. More than one lakh people died. Thousands of people were injured and millions of people have become homeless.

Whenever a major quake occurs, we start thinking about our unplanned populous, tottering Dhaka city. Earthquake is a natural calamity, forecasting which is not possible and its prevention is also impossible. But taking some

precautionary measures the losses may be minimised. The first thing is to build a planned city and an earthquake resistant building code should be followed during construction of buildings and infrastructures. In this case Japan may be our example. We know it is the most quake prone country in the world. Taking technological assistance from Japan, we can build earthquake resistant buildings.

So to protect Dhaka city and other big cities from a huge quake, some vigorous measures should be adopted as soon as possible.

Santosh Das, On e-mail