

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.

Night shelters

There has been an alarming rise in the number of street people in the capital. Each night, 15,000 to 20,000 people both adults and children - make the streets of Dhaka their home.

The number of street people rises day by day as many families rush towards the capital from country's rural areas for earning livelihood. They live on the street in inhuman condition and also fall victim to torture, oppression, exploitation and abuse. They live and grow up on the margins of the society in a state of neglect, deprived of affection, care and guidance.

They have no access to basic services like education and healthcare and live in a condition undesirable in any standard living. They remain the most vulnerable group and a serious obstacle to the country's development. In other countries of the world city corporations take steps to resolve the problem.

Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, a major non-government development organisation, has come forward to their aid by launching a five-year project, Amrao Manush project, in March 2008. The goal is to support 10,000 pavement dwellers through dedicated pavement dweller centres, providing them with the opportunity to make

their own choices for a better future. Focused on empowering them to create real and lasting change, the project progresses in collaboration with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) through partner NGOs Sajeda Foundation, Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP), Nari Moutree and Coalition for Urban Poor (CUP).

Nine centres have been set up at Karwan Bazar, Kamapur railway station, Sadarghat, open space of Dhaka stadium, High Court area, Osmani Uddyan, Green Road, Mirpur mazar, Mirpur stadium and Mouchak. Various services are being rendered to them from 8:00 in the morning to 5:00 in the afternoon. Services include healthcare, toilet facilities, arrangement for cooking, daytime rest, non-formal education for children, day care centre for working street women, awareness programmes and advocacy, technical and vocational training, savings and locker system.

As it is not enough, the DCC should take greater initiatives to set up more safe night shelters for street people. If properly brought up the children may become worthy citizens, he added.

K. Zaman
Dhaka



Harassment of pilgrims

I have read with great interest your editorial "PM's warning against fraudulent manpower agents--Time to take concrete action to punish the offenders." We are very much acquainted with harassment in this sector while sending our skilled and unskilled workers in exchange of money that they accumulate by selling land and taking loans at high rate of interest to be paid from the money earned from abroad. Such stories are regularly heard and published in the newspapers and shown on the electronic media.

The thing that I want to bring to the notice of the authorities is that every year thousands of people wanting to perform Hajj suffer at the hands of the middleman and the so called brokers. Every year the aspirant pilgrims who decide to go to Holy Mecca to perform Hajj are misguided by the brokers and middlemen.

For the first time this year, the government has declared a five year long Hajj policy which ensures that middleman and brokers will not be allowed to operate in any way. I would earnestly request the decision makers to launch a wide publicity campaign just from now, so that none can cheat the innocent pilgrims. The middlemen are in the field to tarnish the good image of the government. So, now is the proper time to go tough on these frauds and cheats.

Alhaji Abdul Mannan
Howlader
Executive Director
Haramine Travels and
Tours Ltd., Motijheel, Dhaka

Democratic norms

Democratic responsibility and democratic right are two sides of one coin. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is using their democratic right by calling an unpopular hartal on June 27 this year. If you look at their performance in discharging their democratic responsibility, you might find it very difficult to justify their call for hartal. The democratic responsibility performed looks like this:

a. They have boycotted parliament on a most childish

ground of seat allocation by the speaker. The whole problem was created by their party speaker without consulting the other party. As a prize, the defeated person (ex-speaker) from his own MP seat was elected from the vacated seat of his chairperson in Bogra.

b. They never participated in parliament with constructive role as the main opposition. The leader of the opposition hardly participated until she had to save her MP's position from being declared vacant as per provision of the constitution for absence of more than 90 days in a row.

c. They have not submitted any action plan to solve all the problems for which they are calling the hartal, a measure to dislocate the efforts of the government to solve these problems in the shortest possible time required.

d. A series of destabilizing activities have been noticed during the last 14 months. They have not offered any cooperation to the government to come out of these civil disorders.

e. The most sensitive issue of the trial of war criminals has received no positive support from the BNP and its allies. They stayed away (perhaps deliberately) from parliament when an unanimous resolution was passed to go for the trial.

f. They have politicised personal affairs to misdirect the legal course of action.

I have no reason to malign the BNP, but I want to mention that they are looking at one side of the coin.

Quadir
California, USA

'Financial literacy'

Why does the school system require classes such as math, English, and science, but not basic things that everybody needs in their personal life? We force students to learn algebra, trigonometry, calculus or chemistry and physics, yet how many of us ever use it again after graduation? In contrast, how many transactions involving money will we each conduct on a daily basis for the rest of our lives? Think about each time when we purchase something with a loan, or pay taxes. Even though these transactions are common, we receive very little

financial education on them from our school system, or even our parents, colleagues, and others. Now, it is not uncommon that we apply for a loan to buy a flat or car, or to buy an insurance policy, or opening a BO account, apply for IPOs, or buying and selling shares. How do we expect to make wise financial decisions when we have little education on even the basics?

These are some questions creeping up all the time in my mind, but I feel energised when I read the editorial piece 'You are what you study' written by a senior journalist Syed Fatahul Alam that appeared on 17th May 2010 in The Daily Star.

While the writer has touched other important issues, esp. the need for the students to get technical education to suit job market requirement, rather than obtaining higher general education, I would like to discuss the need to get financial education for all that we all need really all along our lives. We need to recollect no further than the daily news headlines about the mortgage related problems in the USA two years back, the stock market crisis, and how big investment banks were collapsing, or the rising cost of food and oil to see how relevant financial literacy is. Just 20 years ago, personal finance was significantly less complex than it is today, and in many cases, parents supplemented what the schools did not teach. Fast forward to present day, and we now have many options. But because of their own financial woes, in many cases, parents are no longer comfortable with talking to their children about the touchy subject of money and personal finance.

Much has been done to bring awareness to other growing crises such as the dangers of drug abuse, but why has something as important as financial literacy been largely ignored? These are basic pieces of information that are critical to financial decisions. And the better job we do of financially educating the next generation, the more financially independent they will be.

Sirajul Islam
Pisciculture Housing Society
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Power from biological sources

An interesting article on the subject, published on 19 May in a local English daily, deals with the possibilities of cellular biological 'germs' interacting with light and water to produce electricity. It is indeed a revelation to me! My idea is limited to the production of methane gas from solid animal and human waste only. This is a totally different concept. In our interest BCSIR laboratories should study this matter and try it out experimentally to develop a working pilot plant. It will be the salvation of Bangladesh, and no less!

However, as I am ignorant on the subject; I could not understand the writer's statement, which I quote: "Algae and Cyanobacteria have hydrogenases that use sunlight to split water and generate hydrogen without releasing any CO₂". This release of CO₂, however confuses me, as water splits up into hydrogen and oxygen by electrolysis. If hydrogen is used, then the oxygen is released. Where does the CO₂ come from? Is this a misprint; or is there some organic reactions beyond my knowledge limited mostly to inorganic chemistry.

I shall be grateful for a clarification on this CO₂ release from the writer of the article or anyone else who has the knowledge about the subject! I believe a commercial solution about the Algae culture and the set up needed to harness the hydrogen gas, even if it has traces of CO₂, will be an excellent source for electricity in Bangladesh since our geological resources are small and finite.

Engr. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Hartal and we

It is the duty of a democratic govt. to meet the basic needs of citizens of the country. On the other hand, the role played by the opposition party is that of a shadow govt that criticises the activities of the govt to keep it on the right track. But the recent decision of hartal taken in the BNP rally at Paltan Maidan is not a permanent solution to different problems faced by the people of Bangladesh. In a least developed country like Bangladesh, the ruling party and the opposition should play effective roles. The success and failures of the govt should be openly discussed in presence of the ruling party and the opposition. The govt should also take suggestions from the opposition for handling the national issues.

According to statistics, about 40 percent people are now living below poverty line as they live from hand to mouth. I call upon the leaders of both the parties to solve the problems sitting in parliament, as it is the best place for resolving these issues.

Eng. Md. Meheub Haque
BUET

Harsh joke!

I am rather shocked to learn that a BBC radio Disc Jockey (DJ) has recently cracked an unexpected silly joke announcing - "Queen Elizabeth II has died".

Meanwhile, the BBC immediately apologized "unconditionally" for the bad joke cut by one of their radio presenters. I hope that this sort of painful jokes will not be put on air by any electronic media in the future.

Queen Elizabeth II is admired not only by the people of her Kingdom but also people all over the world. Her Majesty is popularly known as the "People's Queen". She has a soft-heart and affectionate feelings for all human beings.

May Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II live long!
Professor M Zahidul Haque
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

Campus violence

With the passage of time, our student politics is no longer based on any ideology. Many students have lost their lives in campus violence.

No student outfit is expected to function as the student wing of a political party, because such a phenomenon is at the root of all evils in the academic arena.

Campus politics should deal with students' welfare only.
Md Mehdi Hasan Khan
University of Chittagong

Thanks to Malaysian PM

We, the citizens of Bangladesh, thank Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Abdul Razak wholeheartedly for giving the assurance that he will consider legalizing all Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia very soon. This assurance was made when our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon him at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre on Wednesday.

Najib Tun Abdul Razak said in praise of Bangladeshi workers' competency, diligence and hard labour that these workers have been contributing significantly to the economy of his country for a long time. He further said that he would place the matter of legalizing Bangladeshi workers before the committee on appointment of workers.

We anticipate that Najib Tun Abdul Razak's gesture would strengthen the relationship between Bangladesh and Malaysia.

M Faisal Saleh
Chunati Hakimia Kamil (MA)
Madrasa
Lohagara
Chittagong

Historical facts

I refer to the "Historical facts" given by Satyaki Chandra of Calcutta as published in The Daily Star on May 21, 2010. I hope Satyaki Chandra would understand the difference between a lawmaker meaning a Member of Parliament and a nominated "Baron" or "Peer". Sir Satyendra Prasanno Sinha and Prof. Kumar Bhattacharya were titled Baron and Peer, not MPs. Then again, to glorify the outstanding personalities like Sir S P Sinha and Prof. Kumar Bhattacharya, one does not have to put down another budding personality like Rushanara, MP.

I wish Satyaki Chandra could use a more decent language about Rushanara, MP than "fighting her way through the ranks". Yes, Rushanara, MP has the unique and exclusive credit of being the first Bangalee MP with a popular mandate in Britain which ruled this part of the world for about two centuries.

Hafeejul Alam
A former civil servant

Criticism

We were hoping, expecting and looking forward to a change after the Awami League government came to power with the promise of 'Din Badal' --the 'Charter of Change' and Digital Bangladesh, winning a landslide victory in the general elections in 2008.

But over one and a half years have passed and there is no change anywhere in our socio-economic life or law and order situation in the country.

It is a common phenomenon that our opposition leaders always criticise the government and vice versa, and the people continue to suffer unabated.

We have seen many changes in our country, in our government, but found no change in habits, manners, conducts, character and performance of our leaders.

If criticism and promises have been the panacea for all ills, then all the sufferings, woes and problems of the people would have been resolved.

Our political leaders, both of the government and opposition, and our government servants may kindly prove their importance, worthiness, sympathy and love for the people through their work, performance and not through criticism.

We all must neutralise the culture and habit of criticising others and holding out promises only.
O.H. Kabir
Dhaka

Women bashing

Every year so many girls are murdered, tortured and raped. Many of them commit suicide. We have laws to deal with the criminals. But we don't take quick steps to arrest the offenders.

My earnest request to the women and children repression prevention authorities, please take quick, positive steps against the criminals.
Mostafa Kaiyum Sharafat
RU

Drinking water transportation



The recent crisis in the availability of drinking water transportation, storage and distribution capabilities in the remote areas of the country points to lack of development programmes in this sector.

There is urgent need of water carrier cargo boats in the IWT sector; with storage tanks near the jetties in different parts of northern and southern districts.

The IWT sector received step-motherly treatment compared to the roads, bridges and culverts' by the preceding regimes. Now even in the dry

season, the earth embankments around the water bodies are crumbling, damaging crops.

In the prevailing political culture practised by society, the long-term projects are avoided, for publicity of short-term, visible projects. The party always comes first in the priority category.

Even in the road and rail transport sectors, there is scarcity of water wagons. The hospitals are full of patients suffering from water-borne diseases.

AMawaz
Dhaka

Energy saving

The govt of Bangladesh took a massive project to distribute energy saving bulbs provided by World Bank to electricity users countrywide on 19 June, 2010. This is definitely a remarkable and noteworthy step when the country is in dire need of electricity. But the whole programme may be jeopardized due to shortage of preparation by one biggest distribution agency like Dhaka Power Distribution Company. They have no experience of performing such programmes like Rural Electrification Board. They are just chalking out programmes of distribution but unaware of practical pros and cons of the whole procedure. Because distribution of almost ten lakh CFL bulbs in exchange of the same amount of incandescent bulbs used by customers in one day requires huge involvement of trained manpower and ample time. It also requires enough organised transport facility. High officials of DPDC are only the planners, but the low level officials and employees who will implement the entire work are still in dark and in confusion. So, the sagacious govt. decision for such a grand programme may end in a fiasco. More time should be given for successful implementation of such work. Any hasty decision may be costly for the govt. and may tarnish its image. Besides, the bulb distribution date has been fixed for the rainy season. If heavy downpour occurs on that day, what will be the fate of the whole programme?

Hasan Ali
Iqbal Road, Dhaka

MPO and MPs

The education ministry declared new 1,022 non-government education institutions out of 6,000 in cue to receive MPO (monthly pay order) for teachers' salaries and benefits. Following this, on 11 May 2010, most dailies in Bangladesh made front-page news that at the weekly cabinet meeting chaired by the prime minister at the secretariat, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid was under fire from ministers for not accommodating their wishes.

The prime minister immediately gave directive to review this list and asked Education Adviser Dr Alauddin Ahmed to prepare a fresh list for MPO.

What was wrong with the MPO list that the prime minister had to send it to the education adviser instead of the minister for its review? The reason is that Nurul Islam Nahid failed to compose a comedy of errors as he was expected with names of non-government institutions eligible for MPO (monthly pay order).

The hurt audience of MPs of the Awami League alleged that his list included many institutions established under the BNP-Jamaat period, while excluding many bearing the name of Bangabandhu. How some ministers can become more influential than others is evident in that cabinet meeting; it is by putting the name of Bangabandhu into anything fair or unfair they do.

The ministers said the

education minister did not understand the pulse of the Awami League politics and they became so narrow as to say that it was because he had come from a different political party. Thank God, our education minister has not understood 'the pulse of Awami League politics' in their way.

Is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman happy in heaven seeing the shameful playing with the list of education institutions for MPO by his daughter as leader of the country?

The prime minister should be concerned only about how many children are dropping out from quality education due to an improper enlistment for MPO, instead of how many times the name of Bangabandhu is dropping out from the list.

It would have been befitting for Sheikh Hasina to tell the aggrieved ministers that they should think about the long-term goal of quality education and thank the education minister for doing his work without fearing anyone.

Of course, there should be no objection to review of anything to make it better. It will be good if more schools are added to the list because many teachers have been suffering due to non-payment of salaries.

Alamgir Khan
Research Associate
Non-formal Primary
Education
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Politicians and campus



In Bangladesh, most front-line politicians, who are either delivering their valuable speech in parliament for the greater interest of the country or making policies for the government as well as the parties, advocate student-politics for it's having not only prolific contribution to our 'Language Movement' and a liberation war but also significance in creating future leaders amongst the younger generation, who will propel the country to reach the highest peak of prosperity.

Most of the students of public universities come from middle-class and peasant families; thus political leaders are utilizing the public universities as reservoir of activists. So, it is clear that politicians will never say anything against 'student-politics' but conscientious intellectuals, students and guardians should start rethinking about it.

Md Raihan Uddin
MSS (Economics)
University of Chittagong