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From Russia with promise!



Putin's performance

When President Vladimir Putin took over from the out-of-touch and weird Boris Yeltsin, he made lots of promises to Russian people. Mr Putin promised reforms, improved public services and living standards, foreign investments and so on. Most importantly, he promised to bring an end to corruption. I was eagerly following Mr Putin's progress because our humble PM Khaleda Zia - then leader of the opposition party - also came in power, promising to bring an end to corruption. Now we all know how spectacularly Khaleda Zia has failed in her "promise" (as every Bangladeshi governments do). But what about Mr Putin?

Mr Putin has recently given the Russian Navy the fastest and quietest nuclear submarine in the world, the Gepard (the cheetah). He did

some other bits and pieces here and there and he is seen regularly on front pages, keeping himself busy with international matters. However, he has done nothing big. Nothing major to bring any real change for Russian people and he has completely failed to address the Chechnyan issue. He was very quick to order himself a very expensive presidential plane (Russian version of Air Force One), while thousands of government workers are never paid their hard-earned wages. Playing world politics while ignoring more pressing issues at home is not going to place Russia back to its former glory. Isn't Mr Putin simply pretending to be something he is not? So far, he has only delivered the 'promise'. What about the goods?

Azad Miah, Oldham, UK

then why not the other eleven field commanders who had the equal contribution as Ziaur Rahman did is not being elected for the Independence Award?

It will be wise if Bangabandhu is given the status, which he deserves as our founder and Father of the Nation and Ziaur Rahman as a freedom fighter. The valiant sons of our soil are not private property of any political party. They are our pride and they belong to us. It is our responsibility to see that who has given us this country through war and blood and we should give them the respect they deserve.

Khalid Rahman
Dhaka

I could not believe that some of your readers could support the idea of awarding Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman the Independence Award together!

Bangabandhu is the founding father of the country and Ziaur Rahman was a Major of our army in 1971! There is no way of comparing the two personalities at the same level.

Amina Ailm
Dhaka University

How can any one support the Government decision to award Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman together?

I am not in, anyway, trying to underestimate Ziaur Rahman's contribution in liberating our country. But he can, no way, be compared with Bangabandhu.

Zamilur Rahman
Motijheel, Dhaka

I don't see any problem in awarding Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman the same award together. Both of them have immense contribution in liberating Bangladesh, both of them had been the Head of the State and both of the were the founding leader of the two most important political parties in our country.

So why is this debate over honouring them with the same award?

Raihan Rahman
Banani, Dhaka

We need similar action plans from our city father to save us from the constant sufferings of mosquito biting. Whatever may be the requirements in terms fund or manpower resources, the priority to eradicate the curse of such a serious nature must be appreciated by everyone and if need be mobilisation of citizens area-wise can be undertaken for the purpose of awareness and follow-up actions.

During my recent visit to India (Hyderabad and Kolkata), I was surprised to find an almost mosquito-free environment. It may be worthwhile for our City Father to find out how they are dealing with the problem.

It may also be interesting and pertinent to read a news item on the subject which appeared on 28th January 2003, issue of 'Deccan Chronicle' of Hyderabad under heading "OU Scientists Advocate Simple Solution To The Stinging Menace" "Bats are nature's mosquito mats".

Z Rahman
Gulshan, Dhaka

Will the Government do something about the unbearable mosquito menace? This is a common problem in our country. If the Government cannot eradicate mosquito fully, they should at least take initiative to keep it under control. But every year they linger in this process till people's life become miserable and mosquito related ailments like malaria and specially dengue break out almost in an epidemic form.

Be it Awami League or BNP, it's the same old situation every year.

Khan Jahan
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

landowners were paid at the rate of Tk.5000/- per katha.

I don't know what would be the price for this land at Purbanchal. If the authority considers the case of the concerned landowners and fix the price equitable for such applicants, it would be a great relief for them. Otherwise, it would be a great burden and injustice to them. What should be the price for a katha of land which was taken away by Rajuk in May 2002 only at the rate Tk.5000/-?

We would request the authorities concerned to consider the matter humanely and fix an affordable price for them and allow them to pay the price in 20-25 years in instalment. Otherwise the poor landowners will

been living in Bangladesh and not as I do, in Birmingham. For all my natural sympathies for it my occasional appearance and residence in the land of my ancestors always ended with a sense of relief when I came back to dear old blighty. Was this due to a lack of loyalty, inability to appreciate the beauty of Bangladesh, having become too used to the decadent ways of the West or was it a nagging suspicion that I felt stifled in Golden Bengal? The latter obviously! Whether it was the suffocating social strictures of my highly orthodox and extended family or the soul corroding culture of *baksheesh* I don't know but I knew that I loved the land, the culture and many of the ordinary people.

and is thus likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

...which summarised an article - An Anglosphere Primer, by James C. Bennett presented to the US's Foreign Policy Research Institute.

I read it and found myself wondering whether I'm starting to hear, at last, the voices of the lunatics who have taken over the asylum, including the asylum of my own duped subconscious! Make no mistake, these are the sanitised outpourings of the inheritors of the views of Cecil Rhodes, (father of erstwhile Rhodesia), Joseph Chamberlain, (father of Victorian Birmingham and Neville!) and all those other 19th century Anglo-Saxon hegemonists.

To paraphrase a New Labour

War in Iraq can in no circumstances be justified

We must see this all in the world perspective and not just in the Iraq perspective that the US wants us to see. Allow me to illustrate what I am trying to say. The fact is that Saddam Hussein has no weapons of mass destruction. Because if he had any he would not have hesitated to use them by now. Because he knows that there will be war no matter what he does as you do not station over 250,000 troops with the added cost of millions of dollars of maintenance of those troops in that

Re-creating History

I have recently been spending a lot of time in the national archives poring over newspapers (namely, Ittefaq and the Observer) from 1971. It has been really amazing experiencing the revolutionary optimism and victorious euphoria that existed in the newly independent Bangladesh through the pages of these newspapers. I am humbled by all the blood and suffering of women and men to bring about independence and am saddened by where we started and where we have come only 32 years since independence. Where did our ideals of democracy and secularism go?

As a backdrop to my work, I read *The Daily Star* Letters Page every morning and am tormented by the raging controversy created by the BNP government giving the Independence Award to both Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman. I am appalled at the selective memory of our people. Zia may deserve an award for things he may have done but he cannot be put at par with Bangabandhu. How can we say that the award was given to Sheikh Mujib because of his "contribution to the War of Independence"? I don't think Sheikh Mujib's primary role in an independent Bangladesh can be called a mere "contribution". He is the Father of the Nation, it is very simple really and what happened in his administration in the ensuing years of independence does not take away from that fact.

And all the letters from my fellow country people lauding this govern-

ment for this award! It is disheartening really to live with the knowledge that I come from a people who are so ungrateful, short-sighted and lacking in fairness.

Sherzad Latif
Eskaton Garden Road, Dhaka

Wishful thinking

If I were asked what did I wanted for my country, I would have definitely asked for peace and safety in public life. Next I would have asked for quality education and health care. Can't we address these three problems first?

Is it very difficult and impossible a task? Do we have any data on each of these sectors? Also see what other sector is surpassing these sectors? If these three sectors are surpassed by any other sectors, then what is the rationale behind these? Is there a unanimous decision in the Parliament about it?

Sudipta Haque
Bergen, Norway

Independence Award

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not only the founder of Bangladesh but he was and still is the identity of our nation. He was a versatile leader, an effective orator and a true statesman. In my point of view in the history of Bangladesh I do not find anyone capable enough to be compared to this great son of our soil.

I do not deny Ziaur Rahman's contribution for our freedom but I strictly deny the fact that he is to be compared with Bangabandhu. If so,

Mosquito menace

It seems mosquitoes are ruling Dhaka and there is no one to look after this problem and for that matter any other problem.

In winter, Dhaka becomes the city of dust and during monsoon, a city of mud. The origin and evolution of mosquito is in stagnant dirty water, but the City Corporation is planning to spray insecticide! Instead of cleaning ponds, canals and drains in and around the city, how come DCC has taken such an absurd and expensive step? Very strange arrangement, indeed!

Mohammad Mehedy Hasan
Zahurul Haq Hall, DU

Like millions of unfortunate *Dhakaites* the intolerable mosquito biting during 24-hours a day has been an unbearable experience for some time. This was the subject of many news items of our national dailies in the past with pictorial view to draw the attention of the concerned. I firmly believe that with the size of a population and many of them having no basic hygienic living condition combined with total absence of civic-sense/cleanliness culture on the part of most it is not possible on the part of City Corporation alone to solve this problem.

However looking at some of the very bold and positive steps taken in public interest by the authorities concerned in respect of air pollution it goes to prove that; 'if there is a will there is a way.'

Valentine's Day

I would like to make one thing clear to Mr. Arafat (February 21) that I haven't fallen into the trap. Those who say that one does not have the right to celebrate an occasion, it is my earnest request to those people that no one gave them the right to stop anyone from celebrating an occasion, whatever the occasion may be.

The writer has also said, "in future we all try to be more prudent in our speech, and of course, action." Well, if he reads his own letter, he'll hopefully find out that his letter is the harshest of them all.

MinhajAhmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Purbachal plot

Recently Rajuk allotted several hundred plots to the expatriate Bangladeshis who are supposed to pay the prices in foreign currency. The news coming out from the Rajuk authority indicates that it is planning to announce further allotment of several hundred plots to the applicants in the coming months in its Purbachal Project. If the news is true, it's a welcome step on the part of RAJUK.

The applicants expect that this time Rajuk will carry out its responsibility fairly and equitably. When we think about Rajuk, it gives us an impression of corruption, malpractice, irregularities, intrigues and the sufferings of a lot of unfortunate plot and landowners. Nowadays, it has been reported that Rajuk has been under pressure from the government to go on over the right track.

While receiving applications for Purbachal plots, Rajuk made several categories and one of these categories belongs to those who lost their lands to Rajuk. Although Rajuk paid the compensation for the requisition of their lands, the rate of payment was very negligible. The

World Cup and Bangladesh Cricket

After Sri Lanka's loss to Kenya, we should not cry about our cricketers' performance. We should take it as a bad patch, and move on.

Now it is up to our boys to deal with Kenya. If they can beat Kenya, then it will be a good revenge. Good Luck Tigers!

Nasim Haider
Dhahran, Saudi Aramco

Putting in Akram Khan as a replacement of Mashrafeez will not bring any change to the miserable state of Bangladesh Cricket Team in the Cricket World Cup 2003. I do not blame the young talented boys constituting most of the Bangladesh team. In performance and quality they are far superior to those of their age group of the other competing teams. It is unfortunate that the other teams did not follow the same plan like BCB. They built their teams combining the best of the best of their players- both the old experienced hands and the new promising ones.

The reason why we are seeing so many players in different teams playing in World Cup again and again. We had Aminul Islam, Minhajul Abedin, Akram Khan, Naimur Rahman and Javed Omar to give depth to our batting strength (just look at Khaled Mashud and Khaled Mahmood). Couldn't we have had a combination of the experienced and the new potentials? Why do we have to start everything from the scratch every time and thus fail every time? Or, are we incapable of taking correct decisions? With some reservation I may agree that the Board needed to be changed for political reasons. But, why the players? Who is damaging the image of our country? Is it the players or the planners/selectors of the team?

I would request BCB to re-look at the state of affairs and take all necessary steps immediately to have a balanced cricket team to perform its best. Please do not throw away the good works and good plans of the previous management committee as rubbish, put those to use. Otherwise, with the change of every regime if such practice of dumping previous regime's plans go on then our national cricket team will go nowhere. It will be BCB and its management who be remembered as the architect of our national cricket team's failure.

Wahid Shafi, Dhaka

The BCB should take the responsibility for the dismal performance of the Bangladesh cricket team in the World Cup. Because of their sheer mismanagement, Bangladesh cricket is now in such a quagmire.

While most of the teams retain their core players from the last World Cup in England, Bangladesh team is full of new players. Anyone who is performing better in one or two matches in the Dhaka League is being drafted in the national team in the name of giving exposures. The BCB-appointed selection committee

electoral campaign song, I no longer believe that things can only get better.

Joseph Jabbar
Birmingham, UK

Condensed milk

A short time ago, we were astonished to learn that the sale of Bangladesh-manufactured condensed milk was being banned by the government because the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute had discovered the product, from several manufacturers, to contain vegetable fat! Many excuses for this discovery were quickly provided by the manufacturers, but eventually the ban was stayed by the High Court for two months, during which the manufacturers are being permitted to sell this spurious product.

I will not try to second-guess the High Court's wisdom in interfering with the decision of the government, who are, after all, empowered to protect both the health and interests of the Consumer. I am alarmed, however, to note that the manufacturers of this so-called condensed milk are now urging the government to change their standards to permit the substitution of vegetable fat for the required percentage of milk fat in their product, claiming that the product is safe. The safety of palm oil for people with cardio-vascular problems is debatable but this is not the point. A milk substitute cannot be termed milk, thereby confusing, if not deluding, the consumer.

The government is urged not to accede to this absurd request, and to only permit the sale of the product as a "milk substitute". At the same time, import of foreign-made condensed milk products should be permitted with preferential tariffs, to enable consumers to get "the real thing" from countries where such outrageous practices are not tolerated.

Syed Hamde Ali
Bogra

fails miserably to perform its duty.

The BCB also failed to appoint a good coach for the national team. After the appointment of the present coach, the team's performance seems to be going downward.

The BCB should appoint a new selection committee and a qualified coach. If it cannot find a good coach, then it should appoint a local coach like Sarwar Imran. After so many years of successfully leading local teams, he deserves a chance as a national coach.

Mohibul, Dhaka

The frustrating exhibition of cricketing ability by our boys has made us dumbfounded and gives a clear indication to our perilous cricketing future. Bangladesh were made mincemeat of to our opponents including to our utter surprise, to meek Canada in all the group matches they played so far. This disastrous performance has helped raise eyebrows of cricket-loving people about our capability and many found strong ground to suspect on awarding Test status to us. Adding to this, ICC boss made a despondent comment saying "it (Test status) has been given bit earlier, all should have been bit stricter in this regard".

However, before criticising the players, we should give a remoulded thought on why our performance has gone below per expectation. Look at the other teams playing at the World Cup. They all have put importance on experienced players while Bangladesh selection members remain stiff to their principle of stuffing the team with newcomers. World Cup is always a nerve test and comparatively experienced ones can balance themselves with it.

The Manager of a team is the guardian of the players--help the boys focus on cricket, motivate them, wake up the team morale, give instruction to stick by game plan, and of course martinet to maintain discipline. Unfortunately, our sitting manager has failed in all the sections except for showing a fathering attitude.

Bangladesh Cricket Board is the organisation engaged in spreading cricket across the country. Now that board is undemocratic in shape. People from outside cricket has been ruling the cricket administration and petty party interest has been bigger than the golden aspect of cricket. Bringing in coach by individual choice is a mockery with the cricket-loving people of the country. It is just a deception on the passion of cricket. But the man in the chair care a little about it.

Much has been said, but now is the time to take some remedial steps. Forget what happened in the gone matches or what is going to be in next matches, think about the future, take pragmatic steps so that we can bounce back to the level we had and beyond.

Good luck for the coming matches!

Sulav Barua, Middlesex university, UK



Keep your fingers crossed for the next match!

Women's rights

It is true that women in many countries are choosing to stay single longer. This is true for men as well. However the contention ("Football and Women's rights", Ms Robinson, February 15) that the reason for this is the inability of the schools to produce enough men to match the women's expectation is debatable.

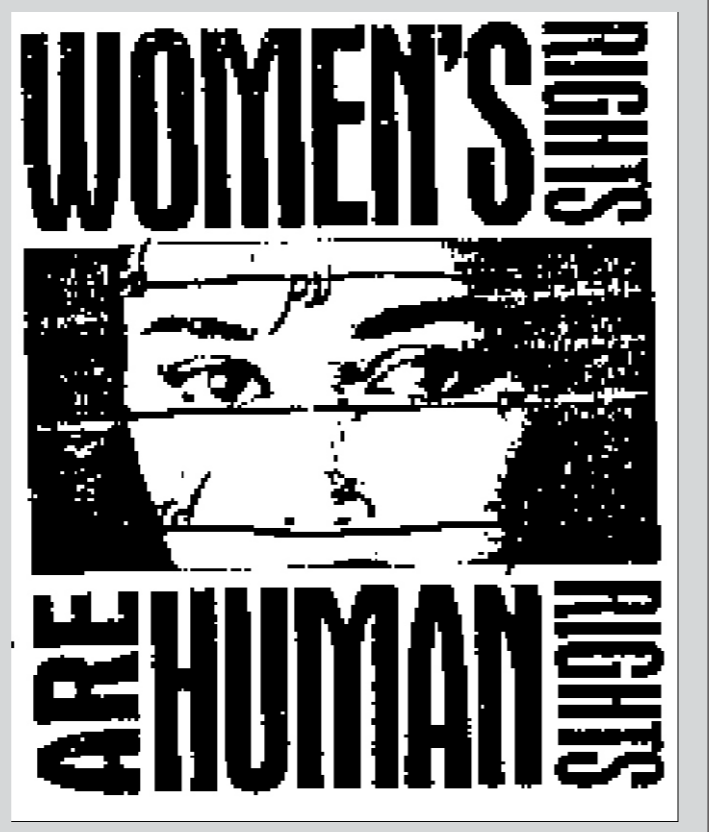
In many European countries and the US in particular, "living together" is a very common method of co-habitation. It permits both the male and female to stay single, while entering into a sexual relationship without extensive rules and obligations. When a partner is tired of "living together", he/she is free to co-habit with someone else.

No single factor can be held responsible for such behaviour. One factor however, is certainly, the individualism that is championed nowadays and the diminishing influence of the family on the individual. For many, socialisation by the clan or family, has been replaced by the mass-media and long-term interaction with people outside the sphere of influence of the family unit.

The proverbial glass ceiling and physical abuse affect women in developed and underdeveloped countries alike. According to the British Equal Opportunities Commission (www.eoc.org.uk), education and profession based on stereotype is still very prevalent in the UK with both women and men continuing to follow gender based traditions. Even though the number of female graduates at the post-compulsory education level is higher than men, women still earn 25% less than their male counterparts. In the area of crimes against women, according to Report 159 of the British home office (www.homeoffice.gov.uk), there were 61,000 in the UK in 2002.

The United States does not fare any better in this area either. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (www.nces.ed.gov) even though the number of female graduates have increased significantly over males, women still earn less than men, similar to their counterparts in the UK.

There is no need to elaborate on the plight of the women in Bangladesh here. For those of us who live and work in Bangladesh, and read the news daily, the statistics are all around for us to see. However, based on my own observations, women in the higher stratum of society in Bangladesh enjoy more privileges and security than their less fortunate counterparts in the cities and villages.



As long as men and women are socialised with different value sets, discrimination against women will continue to exist. Subjective standards and labels such as "reactionary" (Yahya, February 18) cannot be used here to denounce one society over the other, since there is no society (as far as I am aware of), that has accorded the same rights and respect to the women as it has to the men.

Shomit Chowdhury, Dhaka

be in serious problems.

Mohammed Kamal Uddin
Baridhara, Dhaka

War in Iraq

The Daily Star was falling over backwards printing post-editorials by every Tom, Dick and Harry it can wheel out, arguing against the coming war in Iraq.

I am yet to see one article spelling out the case for war. *The Daily Star* readers would be amazed to find that this is not such a rarity after all.

I am not optimistic enough to suggest that *The Daily Star* print some of the more level-headed articles from the Economist justifying the war. But maybe it might favour one written by Salman Rushdie ("A Liberal Argument For Regime Change", November 1, 2002), a lot of which I don't agree with, but one that does support regime change.

Maybe *The Daily Star* and the rest of the knee jerk *peaceniks* can come to accept the inevitability and necessity of regime change and instead concentrate on what should take its place.

MA, Dhaka

Bangladesh, Neo-Imperialism and the Anglosphere

Over the weekend I caught a talk-show on British TV which featured a certain Robert Cooper amongst others.

Robert Cooper is a senior British diplomat and is an influential advisor to Tony Blair regarding foreign policy. After the program I searched the Internet and found that he was the author of an essay promoting a new Liberal Imperialism which was roundly condemned by the Left when it first appeared. I read the article and my knee-jerk reaction was to feel affronted but that aside it was thought provoking.

I asked myself the question what would my life have been like had I

Anyway, according to Robert Cooper, Bangladesh would probably be classed as a 'traditional "modern" state' (!) but not a post-modern state such as the UK or the US. As such it would not be a target for direct neo-imperial rule. (pshew - that's a relief!), but would 'benefit' from a 'voluntary imperialism of the global economy'. This could take the form of complying with the dictates of the IMF, World Bank, etc., or relinquishing some of its sovereign rights to a 'co-operative empire' of neighbours, say if member states of ASEAN or SAARC were to integrate further along the lines of the EU.

As I see it, Bangladesh is already attempting both forms of this Neo-imperialism but I'm sure it would not consider itself a voluntary colony! So on the face of it my dislike for the essay and the thinking behind it would appear to be a dislike merely on the grounds of semantics.

However, this still did not explain my unease at feeling relieved every time I came back to Britain from any stay in Bangladesh. Could it be that I would prefer Bangladesh to be more like Britain? I could not quite find the word for how I felt but then further to my Internet searches on the Neo-Imperialist theme I came across the term Anglosphere.

The following is a description of the Anglosphere found on the net: The Anglosphere school of thought asserts that the English-speaking nations have not only formed a distinct branch of Western civilisation for most of history, they are now becoming a distinct civilisation in their own right. Western in origin but no longer entirely Western in composition and nature, this civilisation is marked by a particularly strong civil society, which is the source of its long record of successful constitutional government and economic prosperity. The Anglosphere's continuous leadership of the Scientific-Technological Revolution from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first century stems from these characteristics

region ready in battle mode for nothing.

There will be war and there is no doubt about that, and not because of Saddam being a threat but because the US seeing there unipolar world and superpower status deteriorating want a firm hold of the single most important commodity that all economies in the world need--oil.

North Korea, have nuclear weapons and have threatened the US that they will launch a pre-emptive attack if the US build up their forces on the Korean peninsula and the US are none the least bothered about that. Is it that the communist North Korea is not a threat to security on the Korean peninsula?

Rather the US is even resuming food aid to North Korea! The US who is not only hypocrites but cowards as well. Syria has the biggest chemical weapons arsenal in the Afro-Asian region, but they are not bothered about that. They say that Saddam is a dictator who has threatened his neighbours but what about Ariel Sharon.

I really think that the US has just turned the spotlight on Iraq and that has faded all these equally important issues into oblivion, which really should not be.

Mohammad Arbaaz Nayeem
Class 11, Mastermind School, Dhaka

Bush and his 'Bush-fire'

"It (second UN resolution) is not necessary as far as I (Bush) am concerned" to wage a Bush-Blair war against Iraq (February 19).

Similarly Hitler, Hirohito duo did not need such a resolution to start World War II. So was the case of Chingis Khan, Napoleon and many others. It seems Bush-Blair duo is determined to make a place along with Hitler and his kind to contribute in the tragic part of human history.

Syed Waliullah
Dhaka