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Shameless bill default

This is with reference to the editorial of 17th June, 'Shameless bill default' by the lawmakers. Honesty is like fluid, it flows downward. You put some water on the head and it will flow down through the neck the chest the waist the legs and up to the toes.

The story of Bangladeshi leaders and politicians is gradually becoming a pathetic one. Not in the eyes of intellectuals of the other world but nowadays it is a common topic even amongst the rural poor. It's not about anything that needs an educated analysis; anybody with the minimum common sense will appreciate that when the leaders lose that minimum integrity or the least amount of honesty their followers get one step beyond. Human, by nature, love to corrupt, if given the lift, our leaders don't seem to pay heed to it. So it is anybody's guess why this social degeneration today.

We were liberated from the oppressors at the expense of so many lives, but our leaders did not bother to appreciate the difference between liberty and wisdom. Today we (the non-residents) are watching it as dumfounded bystanders.

R. Rahman, London, UK

makes a fool out of himself, as he comments on China, since it indicates his sense of insecurity as well as his lack of touch with the real world.

Therefore, I would like to give a haul to Mr. Choudhury and remind him that unless his mighty India wakes up to reality, chances are that all neighbouring countries of India would prefer to join China for economic integration.

Curzon Chatterjee
Stanford University, USA

"Converting Muslims to Christianity"

I thank Sahzeb Shahnawaz (June 18) for his most interesting and courteous reply to mine. I know that some of the more extreme American Evangelical Churches have a very narrow viewpoint but I would assure Mr Shahnawaz that many of the Southern Baptists of the USA are not 'typical Christians'. Even good Baptists in other countries can be embarrassed by them. They are reforming, bless them, but slowly! It is not just Muslims they are against. They probably have lots of books and speakers on how to convert Catholic Christians as well!

And yes, I accept the criticism that, for some Christians, Muslims have simply replaced Communists on a 'hate list' that, psychologically, they need to have. And yes, I accept that, whenever you encounter Christians or even Christian literature, you have to read the small print and find out exactly where they are 'coming from'. And yes, maybe, in the past, some people were lured to Christianity by offers of goodies and status but, frankly, I think that was always a bit of a myth and few missionaries were or are such fools as

to want such 'converts' round their necks, demanding 'favours' - before they drift away. And yes, I agree that some people think that being religious is to be incapable of rational debate. But then, he speaks of certain Muslims who embarrass him! Don't we all have 'em'?

However, your correspondent must surely admit that, in America, the most one-track-minded religions have to accept that other religions, in law and custom, are free to 'sock it back' to them. Indeed, Muslim missionary work in the West gives as good as it gets. In the UK, thousands of pounds are given from Muslim countries, (especially Saudi Arabia) and new mosques are being built in many towns and cities. It is a free for all very like business life, actually, with business methods employed to 'sell yourself' and outdo your competitors.

In my opinion, this attitude is a great deal more healthy than the alternatives, although hard for those in Muslim-majority countries to understand. The very fact that your correspondent has attended churches and meetings with Christians in order to do his research in America implies an openness that I commend him for, most warmly.

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Lalmatia, Dhaka

I read with reservation the letter by Angela Robinson about Christians wanting to convert Muslims in Bangladesh. Having spent parts of my formative years in both devout Muslim and Christian countries (Saudi Arabia and Malta), I beg to differ with her suggestion that Bangladesh is unique in its treatment of evangelicals. My Roman Catholic school in Malta almost got shut

Knowledge is power: Preventing HIV

Whatever the official estimate is, HIV infection in Bangladesh is cause for intelligent concern and calls for intelligent action; certainly not for complacency or misplaced comfort. Preventing HIV infection is by far, and literally, the only viable strategy which must get all out support without reservation of any kind.

Neighbouring countries (Thailand is a notable success story) have successfully demonstrated how to be effective and how effective this tool can be. The key elements are: plain talk, widest spread, innovation and flexibility of technique. And fine tuning of a general strategy to get maximum impact at minimum cost; for example, special focus upon the young and adolescents,

equal coverage of males and females, HIV education within the broad sexual hygiene and health education, peer group mobilisation to get maximum outreach using informal communication and group dynamics. And finally, keeping consistency and continuity of message and method throughout.

What constrained the delivery and outcome of our information and education campaign? These were: convoluted and confusing messages (facts need to be said clearly and simply), lack of experimentation or innovation, too much reliance on "technology" and too little on "sociology", messages that frighten more than empower; all of this with a general climate of denial.

Penchant for formal midterm reviews without continuing progress and task evaluation, not to speak of ritual seminars and workshops without getting to expected outcomes.

Organisations with demonstrated competence must get lead role and assigned tasks to deliver. The Minsitry should do what it does best that is policy and funding. Given the vulnerability, proximity, and continuing public apathy, it is high time to re-think, and re-invent, to bring about a sea change; in short, a complete overhaul and strategic realignment in the country wide information and education on HIV within broad sexual and reproductive health education.

Dr. Zakir Husain
Dhaka

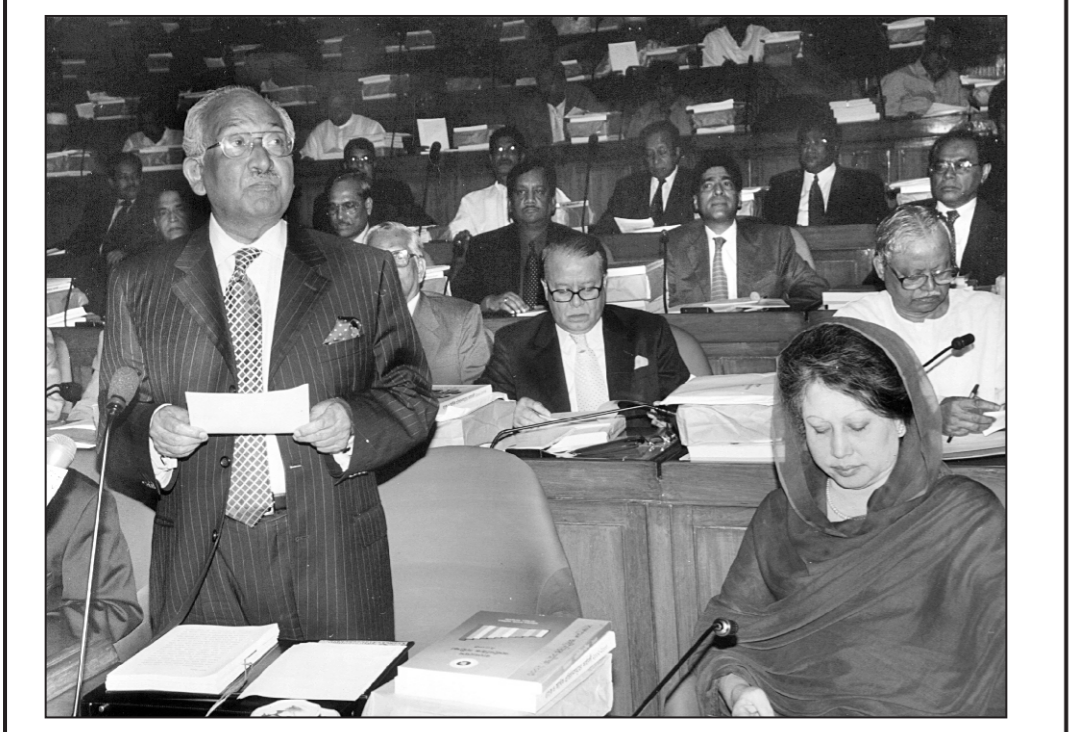


HIV positive: How does death look?

Unwarranted advice

I find it very obnoxious for an outsider like Mr. Arnab Dutta Chowdhury (Wake up to reality, June 19) to advise what Bangladesh should do, or should not regarding her preference. Certainly, his sarcastic remarks are laden with fervent nationalistic jingoism that exposes his sense of Indian supremacy, or as it is said in Calcutta, with a "dadagiri" attitude.

However, more then ever he



Budget thought

Once again we have been presented with a budget that does not truly address the underlying problem of our economy; instead of helping those that are the sole reason of our nation's progress, we insist on sinking money into areas that have shown no sign of improvement in the past 32 years of our independence.

We must stop unduly wasting scarce resources on the lazy, illiterate masses and instead try to help the industrialists, entrepreneurs and businessmen - the people who have proved that they are competent and capable of improving their own fortunes and thereby those of the nation itself. Once this segment of society is firmly set, the trickle down effects will raise everybody else.

A.K.M. Atiqur Rahman, Ph.D
Associate Professor and Chairman,
Department of Economics
North South University

Our Finance Minister announced in the Parliament the budget for the year 2003-04, reportedly his 9th as the Finance Minister of Bangladesh under different nationalist governments. I leave it to the judgement of the Minister himself as to whether he could achieve any perceptible progress in the economic arena since he first became the Finance Minister of Bangladesh. However, it can be concluded without any bias that over the years the status of Bangladesh has almost been institutionalised as one of the poorest countries in the world.

Continuous regressive taxation has made Bangladesh a country of cruel contradictions. Probably, it is the only country in the world where the poor are compelled to pay for the well being of the rich, where the infant food items are made relatively dearer than the diamonds and drinks, where junior employees in the private sector is made to pay income-tax but the big bureaucrats in the public sector are exempt from that and where the establishment remains stark silent over the collusion of the business elites and the bureaucrats, plundering billions from the national exchequer through blatant corruption, "systems loss", tax evasion, fictitious books of accounts, under the table dealings, and many other guise.

Again it is the only country where the rich people become bank-defaulters by

billions and remain unscathed, but the poor women in the remote villages rearing cows or goats or doing some handicrafts are put under obligation to pay high interests on their small loans and there are many more such heart-rending instances.

There is no denying the fact that today's social unrest and frail law and order situations are but the direct consequences of these callous economic disparity deliberately created among the various strata of the society. Just calling the armed forces for a few months and apprehending a few criminals or frequent reshuffling or refurbishing of the police force would not change the crime scenario at all, as we have seen before that such cursory actions result in further messing up of the problem, instead of unravelling the same. If concerted and immediate efforts are not taken to contain the economic and social inequality, the country may face a total anarchism in a flash.

Hafeejul Alam, Dhaka

I am writing this in connection with the proposed National Budget 2003-2004, Our Honorable Finance Minister has proposed that, we have to pay three years TV License Fee at a time while purchasing a TV set. It is quite true that there are quite a good number of defaulters, who do not pay the yearly license fees regularly. This new regulation will at least ensure the revenue of three years license fee together to the Government exchequer.

Nowadays keeping a television at home is no more a luxury, it is quite an essential item of a household. A colour TV can be bought with less than eight thousand taka. People from the middle-class family can somehow afford to buy a TV with their modest savings, but it will be quite difficult for them to pay an extra amount of taka one thousand five hundred, equivalent to three years license fee. This will surely discourage them to buy televisions. It will be an extra burden for them.

Under the circumstances, I would like to request Finance Ministry to review the matter and keep the present system of paying license fee on annual basis to ease the burden of the middle class society.

Duncan Chowdhury
Tejgaon, Dhaka

down by their socialist government in the mid '80s for allegedly meddling in political affairs by the Church; our headmaster had to have the Pope intervene in order for us to return to school. As to Saudi Arabia, non-Islamic public preaching is simply forbidden.

To add to the anecdotal evidence of foreigners openly preaching in the streets of Dhaka, I was once bemused to have a Bangla leaflet about converting to Christianity shoved into my face by a priestly Caucasian male at Mohakhali railway crossing. While living in the UK for instance, I was impressed to meet Jehovah's Witnesses who had enrolled in Bangla language night-classes in order to convert masses of Bangladeshi immigrants. I am not anti-religious; on the contrary, religion and faith are quite private matters for me. Yet I'm not fooled by Western notions of "secularism" which in practice are nothing more than hypocritical social bytes.

I think Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed was quite right to point out the recent excesses by the American preachers in Afghanistan and Iraq. Using religion to grab power and money is a universal trick mastered by many - and it's no different for the right-wing evangelicals here in the US.

As for Brits being tolerant, do I really need to remind her of the time when talented Bengali Muslim-weavers had their fingers brutally chopped off because their trade threatened the livelihoods of Britain's textile workers? How about President Blair a true Brit would know what I meant, who incidentally has been reprimanded for being overtly religious, fabricating lies about weapons of mass destruction to get an early share in Iraq's oil and postwar contracts - alas at the cost of thousands of innocent victims.

Shabbir A. Bashir, Ph.D
Stanford University, California, USA

Need educated leadership

I noticed your reporting on the BISS discussion about Bangladesh's foreign and defence policies. Well, it takes a deep level of wisdom and alertness about strategic theories to create and implement any policies of that sort. Unfortunately our leaders of past and present have excelled in criticising each other in primitive, village-politics style; I wonder how many have any solid grasps of world history and international strategy. Many are too busy calling strikes etc.

In a culture of uneducated and primitive politics, can we expect any effective outcome in terms of diplomacy or strategic wisdom?

I strongly agree with Mr. Hafiz's comment that "National security has been vaguely defined." But should it be a surprise? When our elected officials fail to even secure their own tiny neighbourhood, how can we dream to see them succeed in securing this nation?

Maybe before long we need fresh blood in every level of our political and administrative systems, instead of traditional family-owned politics and "yes-sir/madam" administration that have been compromising this nation's interest since independence.

We need a group of officials with enthusiasm, education and personal integrity.

Tirtho Mahmood
California, USA

"Letters Page and some contributors"

A sapient man is known as a fool in the town of fools! Same is the position of Mr. Yahya. He is one of the very few writers of this Page who really know what they are writing about! Half the contributors of this Page only blurt out whatever they hear here and there. And if someone gives a fresh view on the topic bringing in a new perspective, people like Mr. Chatterjee and Ms. Monorama start talking against it! I think every letter written by Mr. Yahya is an enlightening experi-

ence; they are eccentric yet true and refreshing. Please keep writing Mr Yahya; there are people who hail your views!

Farhan Ali, Dhaka

Tax treaty with USA

With due respect I am writing to request you if your paper can bring this information to the Bangladesh delegation who will be meeting with Mr. Colin Powel during his visit to Bangladesh.

I was in USA (with J1 visa) for a while, and felt very frustrated that while receiving the same salary with colleagues from China, Egypt, India, Tunisia, I had to pay a lot for taxes because I am from Bangladesh.

And this is because of tax treaty. Bangladesh do not have this treaty with USA, while 58 countries (as of 1998) including India, Pakistan, China, Japan, Egypt, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, Philippines enjoy the benefit of this treaty.

This treaty is very important especially for the students and all professionals who go to USA for study, job, or research work. Because of no treaty with Bangladesh, it costs us a lot for paying taxes that the treaty holding countries never have to pay. Therefore, life in USA after paying these taxes become very difficult.

M. A. Hassan Talukder, PhD
Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan

What shall the Bush-Blair duo do now?

In the recent days, after the US-led so-called "liberators" completed the occupation of Iraq against the will of its populace, reports are being published in the western media that never there were WMD in Iraq nor that can be found in Iraq in the future! The top most intelligence agency in the world, the infamous CIA, reported long before that Iraq did not have the capability to develop WMD. Even the British intelligence reports suggested that Iraq did not have the capability. Hans Blix, the chief weapon inspector, told the UNSC that Iraq did not have WMD, and does not have WMD. He also told that Bush-Blair duo translated his previous reports in such a way that they can attack Iraq.

The self declared "arrogant police constable" of the world, along with the sepy, decided to attack and capture the rich oil resources of Iraq, which they cannot do without the removing the then President, on a false pretext of Iraq having WMD that can destroy substantial US cities and US interests in the world. UK did not lag behind, as it could smell the post-war involvement of "cash" handling in the so-called rebuilding of Iraq. We are bound to remember here that the rebuilding should start since "liberators-cum-destructors" of Iraq attacked and destroyed infrastructure in Iraq using their WMD. Actually, the "liberators-cum-destructors" should rebuild Iraq after their occupation for their interest - not using Iraqi money or resources, rather using their own fund. Surprisingly, except the oil resources of Iraq, the so-called "liberators-cum-destructors" did not spend much time on planning to reconstruct the already demolished Iraq.

Now, the media in their own countries says that the total affair was set on a false intelligence report, rather based particularly on Chennai-Rumsfeld-Wolfwitz demanded customised-report for attacking Iraq. The basic truth behind the hunger for control over Iraqi oil and to establish themselves as the "hyper power" through an unequal war, which was protested world wide before, during and even after the "war for oil", is now coming out clearly to the public.

Not going to their internal politics, now we may ask some questions: If the US-led coalition "liberators" attacked and occupied Iraq on a false pretext, then will they leave the country since the basic ques-

tion is baseless? If they leave Iraq, who shall rule Iraq?

Sajjad Waheed, Dhaka

SOS for Mirpur Zoo tigers

I am not an expert in wildlife. Wild animals are different in their behavioural patterns from each other. As far I know, the Royal Bengal Tigers are more different from other wild animals. Each of this tiger, in the forest, has its own 'domain', a well-demarcated area of about 5-6 sq. miles, where it does not allow any other tiger to enter. A tiger demarcates its domain by putting scratch marks on tree trunks and pissing at the bottom of the trees around. The strong pungent order of the piss and scratch marks keep other tigers off that domain.

In the year of 1974 a stray tiger, at a village in the outskirts of the Indian part of the Sundarbans, was tranquillised, caged and relocated deep in the forest. The foresters observed that in the evening a day next to the day it was released in the forest, the tiger came back to the cage and stayed the whole night in it. The next morning it went out of the cage only to get killed by another tiger about twenty meters off the 'shelter'. The area in the forest, where the tiger was relocated was the 'domain' of another tiger. The 'reigning' tiger could not stand of an intruder of its kind in its domain.

I will request the Authorities concerned to think twice before relocating zoo tigers in the Sundarbans. Breeding of tiger in a zoo can easily be controlled before their number become unmanageable in that zoo. Being rational we should not put the lives of zoo tiger in great peril by releasing them in the forest. If no zoos want to accept tiger from Mirpur zoo under exchange program, please donate them these 'excess' tigers.

Faruque Hasan

Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Let us offer our sympathy for the victims of the pro-war lobby

It must be really difficult for those advocating Americans' benevolent intention towards Iraq. Since the vast majority of the world population including a significant section of her own remains unconvinced. Despite advocating "democracy" you have ignored the opinions of the majority but simultaneously you are trying to dictate the same to Iran, with your "elected" president. Real dilemma! How difficult it must be to liberate the Iraqis with bombs and missiles, then having to "sell" their oil on their behalf through your own multinational firms! To date these ungrateful Arabs are not coming forward to show any kind of appreciation, even though you chose to "liberate" the Iraqis over the long-suffering Palestinians. Even your media like CNN, Sky or FOX have yet to conduct a poll asking the ordinary Iraqis how they feel about liberation, in an attempt to vindicate you. Since the earlier media staged destruction of Saddam's statue by a handful of marines, reporters and Chalabi's men has not convinced anybody. After all you were waging the war on behalf of the Iraqis, even though you never consulted them, but simply assumed their support, which is natural since what is good for America must be good for the world.

You wonder why these ungrateful Arabs view you as state terrorists even though you made a few mistakes in past. You thought the only Pharmaceutical factory in Sudan was a chemical factory producing Chemical Weapons, or the huge civilian airliner that was shot down in "error". It is not your fault when your soldiers got a bit carried away in popping those retreating defence-

Tourist attraction!



Somebody please explain how can the reduction of the prices of alcohol attract tourists? Firstly, the prices are already minimal compared to other countries-specially the West. We have problems in abundance, in attracting tourists; which have been existing for a while. Unlike our neighbours, who are taking advantage of the tourism sector-making Bangladesh a point of transit, with the hassles of ZIA they wish they could avoid those few hours of their trip as well. Why would they come in the first place?

It is very easy to answer that, let's look at the hurdles in the eyes of a visitor; Bangladesh is still unknown to the world and is yet to build a

reputation as a tourist hotspot- so visitors aren't really dying to come here. To top that, getting a visa is hard enough and has gotten harder, as complained by numerous foreigners (not tourists, they HAD to come for their work!). Once they arrive, our courteous customs officials are more than happy to make their life miserable. There's no security, risks of missing baggage, unnecessary harassment by the officials, petty thugs outside the terminal are waiting to get their share, lawlessness all around. Those were only around the airport; transportation can be troublesome, the entire infrastructure in dysfunctional, workers are

very unprofessional. Yet we have so much to offer, we cannot provide the means to have them accessible to our visitors. The entire tourism sector is under-utilised. FACT: We have the longest stretch of unbroken beaches, and we ourselves are not aware of it...which can be summed up as 'we are sitting on a gold mine, but can't afford a shovel to dig it out!'

I request the readers, specially the foreigners in Bangladesh to share their opinions/ personal experiences in our country. What better way is there to find the answer...?

Shaker
On e-mail