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Stop killing birds, protect environment



Avis under attack!

In order to live a healthy life, a healthy environment is needed for everyone—human beings, animals, plants and birds. As we, the human beings are most powerful, the responsibility of maintaining the ecological balance chiefly depends on us. Smokes and wastes of factories, chemical fertilisers used in croplands are very harmful for the environment. Millions of tons of toxic material released from these factories have been polluting the water and thus affecting our health.

We use tons of poisonous elements to prevent insects in the farmlands, which gives us a temporary relief. But its adverse effect last for a long period. And this may be disastrous for various aquatic lives including fishes. Agricultural products (vegetables) are also affected by these poisonous ingredients and through taking such vegetables we may suffer from various diseases. Birds play a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance. They do it through picking insects off the arable

lands. So we need protect all sorts of birds to maintain a healthy ecological balance in our country. But often they fall prey to a group of people who kill these birds with airgun. Birds act as our silent friends. In order to protect them and to maintain a balanced environment we must ban air guns.

The Ministry of Forest and Environment may kindly take up appropriate measures to ban the use of airgun.

Sree Jashodhan Pramanik
Bampara, Natore

Nisha Sharma

The media hype in the case of Ms Nisha Sharma, the Indian Software Engineering student calling her the "toast of India" only goes to prove that of late newspaper reporting is more concerned with any sensational news than going into the depth of a matter. I fail to understand why Nisha had to wait till the groom's mother and sister-in-law slapped and spat on her father's face. An educated girl like Nisha should have protested much earlier sparing her parents the humiliation they had to suffer on account of her. In the first place at the very outset she should have vehemently objected to the entire dowry demand and told her parents not to succumb to any kind of demand. What is the use of pursuing a degree in engineering if it did not boost her self-respect?

This should be an eye opener for all educated girls. Thank God in our country dowry is mostly poverty related and not so much an acute problem in upper middle-class and well-to-do families. Educated young girls should come forward condemning the practise, they should be more vocal about this demeaning social crime and also try to create awareness among themselves not to 'surrender to the commercialisation of union between two people' as Salma Khan of Women for Women has called it in her letter. Taking and giving dowries are crimes and educated young people both the male and female should not be a party to it and be able to shun it aggressively.

Farida Huq
DOHS(old), Dhaka

I fully agree with Ms Salma Khan and instead of eulogising Nisha Sharma, condemn her for being a party in agreeing to give dowry. She informed the police about it only when her father couldn't meet their demand anymore.

What if her would-be in-laws remained content with the dowry that was already given to them? Would Nisha Sharma still go to the police? Very unlikely. Then why this hype about her?

Sonia Pasha
Dhaka

Colin Powell and Sheikh Hasina

As per newspaper reports Collin Powell did not meet the Leader of the Opposition, as her party called for a *hartal* on the day he visited Bangladesh. If that is true we are happy to know that. We hope that when the present Prime Minister will be in the opposition and calls for a *hartal*, the visiting foreign leaders will refuse to meet her.

We request the Western embassies in Bangladesh not to issue visa to a political leader, whose party calls for *hartal*. Our political leaders have grown a habit of performing *omra haj* every now and then. We also request the government of Saudi Arabia not to allow those political leaders to visit Kaba Sharif, whose parties call for *hartal*.

As our political leaders will not pay heed to the solicitation of the civil society of the country for not to take recourse to *hartal*, which destroys the economy of the country and makes general mass to suffer, we need foreign help to bring our

political leaders to their senses.

Can a civilised person imagine that political activists throw bombs inside the passenger bus to kill people in the evening previous to a *hartal* day to create panic! This has been happening for years in Bangladesh. And their political leaders never dissuade them from performing such a heinous act; rather they encourage them to do so!

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

"Need educated leadership"

This is in reference to the letter "Need educated leadership" (June 20).

With due regard for any constructive criticism/suggestion from any person from any where we seem to forget the following facts:

1. Looking at the contemporary history with the developments and happenings all over the world and without any complacency it must be admitted that Bangladesh today has come a long way from its devastated war-torn basket case.
2. Tragic events of the very early years of our independence and a long period that followed thereafter till the process of democracy began in 1990 should also be taken as the supreme prices/time for consolidation of our freedom.
3. No one should forget or underestimate the capability of our people in respect unbelievable reconstruction/rehabilitation carried out to restore the basic infrastructures severely damaged during our Liberation.
4. Of course we have many problems like other developing countries; our uncontrolled population with its consequent effect in education, health and unemployment is perhaps the No 1 major factor that must be the most serious cause of concern for everybody.
5. Educated leadership having honesty, sincerity of purpose and above all love/sense of sacrifice for one's own country are the obvious qualities required to transform this unique homogeneous nation to be the example of a model of progress among the South Asian countries.
6. The writer Mr. Tirtha Mahmood and many such educated youths like him instead of ending their duties by feeling sorry for our lot the way it was done in the subject letter should think of reversing the process of migration and face the realities of life to take part in nation building.

Z. Rahman
Gulshan, Dhaka

Protect women
On June 6, I read a shocking news in *The Daily Star*. A 60-year-old woman was raped and killed.

Until now, we have always considered the older people especially women to be comparatively safe. Then how come an old woman was victimised of such a brutal crime. It is an ominous sign for the society.

The Resource Integration Centre (RIC) has been working for the last 14 years with the objective of providing social and economic security to older people. RIC will take up the issue and generate nation-wide public opinion. But at the same time the government and the human rights organisations should also take initiatives to the protect women, both young and old. Or else we won't be able control deterioration of social and moral values.

Ferdoushi Begum
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Quorum crisis

This is in reference to the news item "JS sessions riddled with quorum crisis". This crisis has been prevailing for a long time now. It seems that once the MPs are elected they don't bother representing the people and their plight anymore. They don't even bother to be present in JS. But interestingly, they never reject the facilities attached to it.

In its 132 workdays, the JS never witnessed the presence of 60 legislators! What does it indicate? Are the MPs so busy that they don't have time to attend the JS session! And what is the Leader of the House doing to improve the situation? There needs to be serious debate on why the MPs are reluctant to attend the session and what needs to be done to make their presence mandatory. And another important issue, something has to be done about the Opposition's frequent walkout. The responsibility lies with the ruling party. They are the one liable for maintaining a congenial atmosphere in the JS. But they are acting the very opposite— creating reasons for the Opposition to walking out of the JS while their own attendance remains extremely poor.

But why should we continue to pay them while they continue to appear as the absentees? It's costing the exchequer and the mass immensely, but the legislators are not least bothered about it. Moreover, now a bill has been raised for increment of their perks and other facilities! What next?

Jamil Raihan
Dhaka

Bangladeshi troops in Iraq



Forward march!

After the war, it is an interesting development to observe that American government would rather welcome Bangladeshi troops to perform peace-keeping task in Iraq, which I believe, Bangladesh should consider with political maturity.

For, despite Bangladeshi insistence on diplomatic solution as an alternative to the war; what is done cannot be reversed, and because of changing nature of geopolitics, Bangladesh should make dramatic adjustment to the new reality.

Besides, should Bangladesh participate in peace keeping task in Iraq, I believe, it would become beneficial both to the people of Iraq and Bangladesh, and thus, once again, it would prove Bangladeshi commitment to peaceful solution of a crisis, which the people of Iraq right now deserves desperately.

In other words, active engagement, rather than passive isolation should become priority of Bangladeshi foreign policy towards ongoing Middle East Crisis, so that like the First Gulf War, Bangladesh can contribute her effort to express her solidarity to the Iraqi people and the world in general.

In addition, given the global economic meltdown, from a pragmatic perspective, such a participation in Iraq would also become beneficial to her economy; especially, in accessing US market for the shrinking garments and apparel industry, easing visa restriction, and above all, warming up US-Bangladesh relation.

Therefore, I believe that political as well as civil societies in Bangladesh should consider such an option with seriousness, since behind this proposal, I believe, lies a win win situation for all: people of Iraq, Bangladesh, and USA.

So, let bygone be bygone, let's look forward, and heal the world.

Shibly Azad, Columbia University, NYC, USA

The government is in a dilemma whether or not to send troops to Iraq as requested by the US Government. Bangladesh should send troops. But before doing so, the government must lay down some specific conditions. They are: there must be a civilian government in Iraq. It must be formed by the Iraqi people themselves and not by expatriate Iraqis and also without any outside interference. The Bangladeshi troops will work there under the supervision of the United Nations only. They will go there as a peacekeeping force and not as a combat force. Their main duty will be to maintain peace and discipline in the country and not to fight with the Iraqi army.

As a peacekeeping force the Bangladeshi troops have already done tremendous jobs in various war-torn countries of Africa and Europe and thereby earned fame. I am sure as a peacekeeping force the Bangladeshi troops will also do the same in Iraq.

Iqbal Ahmed, Dhaka

It's not the BNP or its allies would be the deciding factor on sending troops to Iraq.

The army's say in the matter shall be the deciding factor, and they shall go because of the money involved for such foreign postings. Lobbying may have already started - in the same manner a worker tries to persuade the may-power brokers to the Mid-East.

The army has already become a moneymaking machine rather than a fighting force.

FM, Chittagong

I am writing this letter at the time when a lot of discussions have been taking place in our government and political circles as to whether or not Bangladesh should commit its troops (at this stage) to Iraq. The US expects that we send our troops to Iraq to support the coalition efforts there. Against the backdrop of the expectation, Bangladeshis are now exploring the best possible option, using the criteria like, opportunities, challenges and risks involved in the matter.

I believe our prime purpose of sending the troops to Iraq now should be to ensure the safety, security and well-being of our Iraqi brothers and sisters. As long as we stick to the purpose, it should not pose any major problems for us or our friends or for that matter our local and global interests. In fact, a decision to send our troops could enhance the image of Bangladesh before the people of Iraq, among others. It could afford Bangladesh an opportunity to help the Iraqis in their time of needs. We might have some reservations about the rules of engagement of our troops in Iraq. It is fine. We can negotiate those with the US authorities. After all, there exists a UN resolution on pertinent matter.

The matter of sending our troops to Iraq can be debated in the parliament. But we should not forget that we must rise above the occasion to improve our competitiveness and dynamism in an increasingly re-integrating world.

Dr. M. S. Haq, New York, USA

The Secretary of States Colin Powell's recent visit in our country was indeed an important one, for he made official request to the government to deploy Bangladeshi troops in Iraq.

This request should be taken very seriously for it deals with various sensitive issues— our relationship with the US, our standing regarding the US attack on Iraq and most importantly our relation with Iraq.

If we agree to send our troops to Iraq we would definitely have monetary gain and our ties with the US, Britain and other countries would also strengthen. But then again, after vehemently opposing the US attack in Iraq, if our troops now work on behalf of the US it would definitely create an uneasy situation. But we have to make the best use of the current situation. Our Foreign Ministry has to be very cautious and act very tactfully and diplomatically. They have to make sure that our troops only take part in re-building and peace-keeping work and don't act on behalf of the US force and don't confront the Iraqis in any way. They must work only under the purview of the UN mandate.

Samira Khan, Dhaka

No rationale for taxation

In my view, the government exists because it is in the best position to provide certain services. They include maintaining law and order, providing national security, ensuring education, health care and so on.

Hence we pay taxes to the government as a payment in exchange for these services. But has the government been able to do provide these services in satisfactory manner? I will not even consider discussing law and order. Our defence is a joke. Our education system speaks for itself with all the expelling during SSC/HSC and student politics in the universities. Our health care system is clogged with troubles of all kinds. The public servants will not serve unless provided with you-know-what.

So how can the government impose new taxes? What right does it have to do so given that it has miserably failed to do its job? Why does it need more money, so that it can give us a grander spectacle of failure?

Yahya

USA

Fox and chicken friendship!

Countries like Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are busy saving their relationship with America. They go to extraordinary length to protect their "relationship". Of course, I see nothing wrong with having a relationship. I just have one short question to ask: What exactly has Saudi Arabia achieved from this relationship?

I know a country called Israel - which despite committing war crimes daily - gets billions of US money every year simply because it has a relationship with the US. Its leader—despite being a war criminal—gets the title of "man of peace" simply because it has a relationship with the US. If Saudi or other Muslim countries think they have some sort of relationship with the US, how come they couldn't get Bush to support the Saudi peace plan? How come they couldn't stop Bush from starting an illegal war in Iraq? Why is it that in the last 50 years, the only thing they have managed to get out of their relationship, are some half-rotten peace-plans for the Palestinians? How does the US manages to send a "demand" every time it needs something from the Arabs, but these Arabs at best (despite having their so-called relationship) can only manage a pathetic "hope" with the word "kindly" at the end of their sentence? Why are these relationships so important that Arab leaders constantly have to provide lip service in order to keep them alive?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Doctors and Income Tax

Our Finance Minister has indeed

mixed up the income tax issue of the doctors. He portrayed all the doctors as high-income professionals. We only wish it were true. But the real picture is quite the contrary. Only a low percentage of doctors fall in the category of high or even moderate income group. Most of the doctors are marginally employed and earning.

The overcrowded chambers of consultants of Dhaka or some other district towns do not depict the true picture. Many doctors do not even earn Tk. 12000 per month! Many are unemployed too. There ought to be categorisation of doctors. Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, Consultants and the equivalents, and GPs of good standing practice can afford to pay more tax than that has been fixed. They should be classified as category - A. The category - B should include the doctors who do not hold the above positions and may hold postgraduate degree or diploma, and/or practising for at least 10 years. The rest can be categorised

as category - C. Efforts should be made to 'extract' more income tax from the category-A doctors, because they are the real earners among the doctors which may account for 80% of the earning of the doctors.

SN Bahlool, Dhaka

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SN Bahlool, Dhaka

Jamuna Bridge toll and TV license fee

The present toll for Jamuna Bridge is exorbitant and unreasonable. Why should the people of North Bengal pay almost eight times more than the people who pay for Meghna and Daudkandi bridges combined? Length-wise the former is only double.

The current rates for a car is Tk 400 compared to Tk 50. The argument is that the Govt has to pay back the foreign loan with interest over a period of 30 to 35 years and hence the money must be recovered is untenable. Will the Govt cease to collect toll after 35 years

while the bridge last for over 100 years! Please spread the period for the entire duration to be fair to the public. Besides, present toll collection far exceeds the forecast-happily and also there is extra income from railway, gas, and electricity transmission.

Secondly, the yearly TV license fee is agonising. It simply terrorises the public in urban and rural areas with warnings displayed in TV for several weeks. The wireless act of thirties is outdated and redundant. BTV collects fabulous amount from TV ad and commercials which were not foreseen in the '30s! Besides, Govt collects substantial taxes at import stage and as VAT on TV. Also please do away with poor mans radio fees and obsolete VCRs fees. There is no Govt transmission on VCR! One might as well tax toaster, iron and fridge for domestic use. Please be realistic and reasonable.

Muzammel
Dhaka

Dowry and

"People's right to know"

I have gone through Mr. Mahfuz Anam's nicely drafted and beautifully crafted commentary "People's right to know" (June 21). While agreeing with Mr. Mahfuz Anam that public figures anywhere are subject to intense scrutiny by the media, I would like to ask him about my right to know some of the events that shook this nation a few years ago. I am referring to the series of bomb blasts that took place in the country killing a large number of innocent people. What did the media or for that matter *The Daily Star* do to dig deep into these events and find out the people or the institutions responsible for the killing. Giving first hand information in banner headlines and writing one or two editorial pieces condemning the incidents were not enough.

How about the incident relating to the fake kidnapping of a foreign consultant at the CHT by a group of tribal people some 3 to 4 years ago and his subsequent release from captivity in a sort of dramatic manner?

The media address itself to the public, but I have not the slightest hesitation to say that it often does so as a salesman and a propagandist. It is sad to say that media in Bangladesh have a history of cooperating with both the government and the opposition, some of them function as the Public Relations Arm of the government and the opposition. Not only that, in the name of the freedom of the press and the freedom of expressions, the media sometimes over play its role. I am certain; this has resulted in the public distrust of the media too.

By and large, the media has also not been able to build a reputation for being fiercely independent in their opinion and scrupulously accurate in their facts. What is very ominous is that the media no longer shape public opinion in the true sense of the term—they nearly reflect it.



Reader's right rejected?

Professor Quazi Abdul Mannan
Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
University of Dhaka

I would like to thank Mr Mahfuz Anam for yet another excellent commentary. I hope from now on *The Daily Star* would be more serious in bringing out in depth stories regarding our political leaders. Had they done so with S Q Chowdhury and inform the readers with follow-up stories of different accusation brought against him things wouldn't have gone this far.

Jamila Khan
Jigatola, Dhaka

Congratulations to the Editor of *The Daily Star* for the excellent commentary. We would like to extend our full-fledged support in his quest to let people know the truth.

I cannot imagine how the government could nominate such a controversial person like S Q Chowdhury try for such an important post! Don't they bother about the accusation against him? The government is all ready to overlook all accusations against him! We definitely have a right to know why the authorities are all for S Q Chowdhury even when he runs the risk of defaming the already negative image of our country!

Khan Joyanal, New Baily Road, Dhaka