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Of human bondage

Plight of Arifa -- Can we be of any help?

Your editorial dated September 10, 2003 captioned "Plight of a toddler kidnapped across the border" caught my attention. I really feel very sorry for both the helpless mother and the two year old Arifa who has been taken to India by kidnappers to fulfil their demands. I would like to draw the attention of our foreign ministry officials, or whoever can be of help, and may be the Prime Minister, to step in and ensure the safe return of the child to her mother as soon as possible. Whatever official or bureaucratic formal-

ties may have to be done can be done in due course of time, but just let the child be with her mother first. I also request the newspapers to use their power to create awareness by highlighting the plight of the child and her mother. We have seen the power of the newspapers in building up awareness on a cause and then persuading authorities to take quick actions. My wish is to see a picture of smiling Arifa with her mother in The Daily Star very soon. **Amerul Haq**
On e-mail

service, is better (not the unique one) than any other operators. We know the GP is in collaboration with Nortel and Nortel with Airtel(India). The difference here is that the cost of Airtel SIM card is only Rs 300 (land phone access) which in our country costs Tk 5000(only mobile to mobile) and that's the difference between pure competition and oligopoly.

From a commercial point of view, it may be a great opportunity to be a member of an oligopoly market. In an oligopoly, everyone's profit margins are near monopolistic. About the market strengths of our mobile telecommunications, one can say that the market growth rate and opportunity gap for mobile telecommunication is very high in Bangladesh. And the T&T phone line is still a golden duck, hence too costly. T&T is the monopoly of the state.

Musabber Islam
School of business (IUB), East Goran, Dhaka

May God save our scientific pursuits!

The last line of DS staff correspondent's report on food output (Govt. AL agree on pursuing biotech to up food output, September 9) goes like this, I quote, "Director General of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Dr Nurul Islam Bhuiyan said his institute had applied through the agriculture ministry to the science and technology ministry for permission to pursue adaptive research on vitamin A enriched BRRI Dhan-29."

If BRRI has to apply to so many ministries for permission to conduct research on some type of paddy, what can people expect from this institute? Is this the way to conduct scientific research? Looks like Dr Nurul Islam is treated like a clerk or senior assistant of a government department by the *bara sahibs* sitting inside the secretariat. He does not have the freedom to decide on what should have been a subject of his research, without going through the rigmarole of approaching this ministry or that directorate. One can only say -God help this country and its long trail of bureaucracy!
AZM Abdul Ali

One e-mail

Thumbs up, Tigers

The ongoing tour in Pakistan is really eventful and it is adding a lot of spice to Bangladesh's prevailing cricket scenario. Briefings by the team manager in Urdu, that went on air in Pakistan television, and Pakistan's unique hospitality regarding the Bangladesh team's flight to Multan, is just one side of the story. The other side includes Bangladesh's brilliant performance and teamwork and centuries from Habibul Bashar and Javed Omar, Alok Kapali's hat trick and the first innings lead in two matches. This tour has brought mixed feelings in our minds. In the third Test, Kapali's injury was very disappointing and even worse was the dishonesty shown (Kapali's dropped catch) by Pakistan's captain Rashid Latif.

Can Pakistan expect that from their captain? In contrast to that, in the third Test, our bowler Mohammad Rafique has shown great sportsmanship by warning Omar Gul (in front of the umpire) of a run out that he could have easily taken when Gul was walking down the crease before Rafique bowled the ball!

The victory would have surely been Bangladesh's if the umpiring been done without so many wrong decisions. Pakistani commentator, Amir Sohail, kept on passing biased comments even after watching the TV replays repeatedly.

After the series, Rashid Latif said he looked forward to a five-not whitewash in the one-dayers. But no! The captain has been banned from the ODI series! Though there are ups and downs, Bangladesh has shown a good deal of improvement and the credits must be shared with our excellent coach, Dav Watmore. Bangladesh is not far from becoming a strong international anchor in cricket.

Md. Rizwan Shamim
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Rescind US soldiers' immunity pact

We condemn the agreement, which stipulates that if any American

soldier or officer is charged with criminal offences, he can't be tried in Bangladesh or sent to the International criminal court for prosecution. Rather the accused US soldier or officer must be handed over to the US authorities. This pact makes our citizens' lives insecure in many ways and gives birth to huge question in the minds of our people.

Usually, it is an accepted norm that a pact is laid before the parliament. The parliament scrutinises the content of the pact upon which adequate debate has been held. Meanwhile, public opinion takes a clear shape. The parliament, observing the public opinion, passes or rejects the proposal. This is not a voluntary requirement. Article 145A prescribes the same.

In this case, the pact was signed without making any public disclosure. Thus, it means that it did not conform to the constitutional provision, hence deprived the public of their opinion on the matter. It was done unjustly, as per as the procedures are concerned.

Furthermore, Bangladesh is a signatory to the Rome Statute, but is not a state party. Because of this agreement, Bangladesh would no longer come under the jurisdiction of Article 9 of the Rome Statute which provides that the state parties must cooperate fully with the court, especially with regard to handing over people prosecuted by the tribunal or seeking items of evidence. Thus, it infringes the spirit of the Rome Statute too.

Bangladesh's sovereignty has become vulnerable owing to the signing of this particular pact. If members of American Armed Forces enter into Bangladesh territory and ransack the government office or kill somebody, shouldn't we try them under our laws? If not, what is our remedy? Are they accountable to anybody? In fact, it encourages the aggression of US against Bangladesh.

We wonder how a country like the USA, which had attacked a dozens of countries in the last dozen of years, could be relied upon. The US has proved itself as the most crook state in the world. It attacked Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 11th and toppled the Taliban government and consolidated its position there. Later, it invaded Iraq in quest of massive destructive weapons, but found nothing.

It is believed that the US has different motives in mind ulterior motive in mind. From now on, Bangladesh will be a potential victim of US's aspiration and imperialism. The US's imperialism reintroduced nineteenth century thoughts of colonisation. Submission of our national pride can not be acceptable under any circumstances.

We hope that our government will consider details of the pact once again, put it before the Parliament for the purpose of adequate deliberation and, finally, scrap the pact at once.

Bivuti Tarafdar
3rd year, Department of law, DU

US and Iraq

In response to the letter by Farhan Qudus, 10th Sept.

It seems that a lot of people around the globe are already sick and tired of G. Bush. Come on guys, it has only been a few years since Mr Bush began saving the humanity. You people are so ungrateful!

I would love to have the presence of His Goodness amongst us and the protection he provides for humanity with depleted uranium, anthrax, cluster bombs, stealth fighters and his 'nukiller' weapons. If Mr Bush weren't there, who would have taken care of thugs like Sharon, Cheney, Rumsfeld -oops sorry, I meant Bin Laden, Saddam and Mulla Omar?

In America, things work differently. No matter how many people around the world want Bush to go, for the innocent American voters, Bush has plenty of surprises under his sleeves. As the election comes

Umpiring: A big question mark



Howzzat, and...

Bangladesh has shown a great sign of development in the recently played Test matches. They have improved a lot at every area of cricket. The Pakistanis have won the third Test match illegitimately. They did not deserve the win at all. It was all the umpires' poor decisions that had changed the result of that game.

Throughout the series, umpiring has never been world class. Some very loose and pathetic decisions were made against the 10th Test playing nation. It thus shows that everyone likes to go in favour of the stronger side. Asoka De Silva, a so-called umpire, gave several funny decisions and Russell Stiffin seemed to have forgotten the rules of the game.

Then again, in the one dayers, Russel Stiffin stunned the whole world by not giving a caught behind Yusuf Youhana. A couple of very close shouts of LBWs were not given in favour of Bangladesh, which I think would have been given for Pakistan. So, there has been a great discrimination in umpiring which is very painful for the cricket team of Bangladesh.

Thus, I strongly draw the attention of the ICC to take necessary actions to minimise the poor decisions made by the umpires. We, all the Bangladeshi cricket lovers, hope for better and neutral umpiring in the future matches.
Md. Ashiqul Haque, On e-mail

Diplomats fail to project right image

I read the report (Axe to fall on a few diplomats, September 11) by Rezaul Karim in The Daily Star. The story tells us about the PM's wrath on diplomats, both career and political, for their failure to project the right image of Bangladesh.

It is perfectly right for the PM to take such an action. But there are issues here that raise serious questions. The PM is unhappy that her advisers influenced her to make wrong choices in doling out political appointments in missions abroad. The name of the press minister in Washington has been mentioned in this respect.

Is it a right choice to send Mr. Gias Kamal to Islamabad? Mr. Kamal had a stint in London where his performance was as poor as the minister being recalled from Washington. Then again, Mr. Kamal is also in poor health and may end up in the same situation as Mr. Kalamuddin.

Then there is of course the more important issue of the country's image. The report says that the government is eager to project a favourable image of Bangladesh and many of our diplomats have failed to do that. Here, I pity the poor diplomats: for a salesman is as good as the goods he has to sell. Our poor image is due to the situation inside the country and what our politicians do, and, that includes the Prime Minister.

Let me give one example here for a layman to understand what an uphill task our diplomats face. When the PM called the army to tackle law and order, it was a development that our diplomats were hard placed to project favourably. The calling of army for civil purposes is always viewed with suspicion world-wide.

Then, mid-way came an amnesty for the army that absolved them of responsibility in custodial deaths. When the amnesty came, I have no doubt that our diplomats were treated as pariahs, for it was a stupid thing for a country seeking to improve its image abroad.

There is no two opinions about the PM's wrath and initiative. How-

ever, the end result will again be the same and like the pin in the broken record, the same tune will be played when the PM reviews her decision, say a year or two from now, with the new changes she has initiated. With respect to Syed Kamaluddin, the PM was influenced by one group of people around her. With respect to Gias Kamal, her decision was influenced by another group. The two groups have one objective in common; taking the PM for a ride to fulfill their personal motives.

There would be little need for the PM to be angry if she decides instead to inject professionalism in the conduct of running our Missions. To start with, let the foreign ministry have total control over the Missions. At present, the information ministry appoints press officers; the other ministries, officers in other wings such as economic, commerce, labour, etc. With such chaos in postings, our diplomats act under lack of coordination, programme or vision.

It is only in Bangladesh where the foreign ministry is in such a shambles. We must make attempts to unite the diplomats under the aegis of the foreign ministry, and then let the ministry organise the diplomats under a well thought out and well articulated foreign policy vision where building the country's image would rank as something indispensable. We must also give the ministry the resources it needs and then wait for results. Finally, before the PM breaks out in anger, let her contemplate what she as a politician and the leader of a major political party is giving her diplomats to project Bangladesh abroad.
Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka

In poor taste

Certain journalists (for want of a better word) of your paper seem to have forgotten good taste. In a front page report (for want of a better word), entitled "Axe to fall on a few diplomats", it did not mention a single diplomat's name. One name that was mentioned several times, in offensively disparaging terms, was that of Sayed Kamaluddin, the press minister in Washington. The so-called report had very little

matter and appeared to be targeted at him. What gave the 'report' a macabre and sadistic twist was the fact that Kamaluddin is a heart patient with a rather tenuous hold on life. His hospital bill may have exceeded the official limit, but it was not gentlemanly of the writer to have harped on it. The 'report' was not clinical journalism.

There are rumours that certain powerful figures in the profession is angling for the job of press minister in Washington. Such an ambition is not unusual and has nothing reprehensible about it. What is reprehensible is to discard journalistic norms and to blacken someone's name. I am surprised that you allowed such motivated writing. It was cruel, and in poor taste.

Tarik Ahsan
Associate Editor, Holiday Tejgaon, Dhaka

Of Grameen Phone, monopoly and oligopoly

About my letter on Grameen phone (oligopoly and beyond), Mr. Faisal from Dhanmondi commented that Grameen phone did not create an oligopoly. He also said Grameen phone has the highest call charges and so on. But, despite all these things, Grameen phone is controlling the market.

First of all, I said that the government created oligopoly. For the past three years and during the AL government, BTRC did not permit any other private companies to operate in Bangladesh although many showed their interest in this sector. Only Basundhara group, which is about to launch its company in collaboration with Orange, got the license. I do not blame the GP alone for creating an oligopoly, Aktel and Citycell to form an integral part of that oligarchy. All these private operators influenced the government not to permit any other companies.

In an oligopolistic market, everyone produces identical products or services (call charges are not the way to differentiate the service, rather services are differentiated by adding new and innovative features). Grameen Phone, after sales



PHOTO: STAR

Court premise violence

Violence in the court premises, no matter which political party or parties commit, are acts of criminality and unacceptable in any civil society. Needless to say, the nefarious activities of a few political hoodlums under the nose of the law enforcing agencies gave rise to widespread condemnation. It is reported in the media that about 90 people, including some distinguished members of the bar and a number of notable journalists became the victim of brutal attacks. Many of the victims were hospitalised with multiple injuries. The incident reminds us of similar attacks on Dhaka University students at the dead of night a few weeks ago.

The question that creeps in the minds of every sensible citizen is, why such kind of violence happened and how such incidents took place in the presence of police, who are supposed to maintain law and order! The court premises are supposed to be a sanctified place where people go for justice and fairness and one is quite at a loss to fathom why political wrangling should vitiate the judicial atmosphere of our country. This proves we are passing through an era of bad governance where concepts like civil society, political tolerance and democracy are nothing but slogans of deception.
Hafejul Alam, Dhaka

Hafejul Alam, Dhaka

"9/11: Was it a conspiracy?"

Mr. Zaman raised an old issue regarding 9/11 incidence in his letter "9/11: Was it a conspiracy?" Just like him, many Americans still want to believe in a conspiracy theory. Those who find interest in this sort of speculation always refer to some unexplainable coincidences, such as: thousands of Jewish workers were told in advance not to show up at the World Trade Center (WTC), many Wall Street financial offices closed their doors the day before 9/11 attack, etc. If one traces those data, one hardly finds any sources behind them, only links of rumours and conjectures. And, when thousands lend their ears with eagerness to believe these, a fallacy is likely to become a truth. Many also think it's totally unbelievable that all the "efficient" intelligence agencies in America failed to notice any advance indication of the incident.

The intelligence failure of the CIA and the FBI is true, and there was a hot debate along with some serious finger pointing at the high levels of the FBI and the CIA. Based on all these, one is very likely to think about a "grand plan." The only problem is that it's too grand a plan of some sort; to cook up without running the risk of being caught. The American government is a very large organisation and it is true for the FBI and the CIA as well.

If we think it's to be a Zionist drama, then what can

we say about Mr. Laden's videos which are being transmitted through Al Jazeera? Again, theoretically, it's possible that America doctored the videos. May be they even created them and supplied to the Al Jazeera network, to spread misinformation and confusion. After all, Al Jazeera is based in Qatar where US forces have a base.

In that case, the Al Jazeera too seems to be an American collaborator. But is that really so? That America would deliberately kill more than 2700 people, which includes several hundreds fireman, cops, even some children, to take over Afghanistan and Iraq, seems too much. None in the US Congress, CIA or FBI would object to it? And none in the Middle East or Europe would get a hint about it? The sheer number of people needed to be involved to "conspire" on something so grand must be hundreds.

Had the attacks on WTC and the Pentagon been an America created ploy to find excuses to go to war against the Taliban (and later Iraq), it would certainly have been a clumsy one. Any sane person could think of a better, less costly way to do the same. Paying someone to simulate attack on US embassies or camps world-wide would cost less, also would have involved far less risk. America hardly needed to create craters in Manhattan and mass graves under WTC basement to go to war.

Of course, the US actions (I should say Mr. Bush's action, since a large part of America were kept in the dark and supplied with misinformation) since Sept 11 are more controversial and morally questionable. One can also be sceptical about US motive as it implements and influences domestic and international policies in the name of security. But the fact that Mr. Bush is using a national tragedy to fulfil a geo-political (and to some angry Americans, his personal) interest does not mean 9/11 was a set up.

Maybe the US administration is abusing that incidence to boost a falling economy, which began to see recession even before 9/11. The 9/11 just made the situation worse. Although the war further slowed the economy, from logistical, tactical, and strategic perspectives, it is very naive to think that US inflicted its own economy with a Zionist plan to go to war.

Of course, in this crazy world many things can happen. Yet, it is our responsibility to wait for the truth instead of welcoming second-hand remarks and rumours.

Tirtho Mahmood
Albany, CA, USA



The mystery unsolved!

PHOTO: AFP