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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Price hike: hold the rot

The government lawmakers' surprise and bickering over the unbridled spiralling of prices of essential consumer goods since the beginning of the Holy Ramadan, is shocking. Our "Muslim brethren" (traders) had been indulging in this practice of raising prices with as much zeal as they say their prayers with. This matter of the spiralling prices has become an endemic affair in this country.

However, it must be said that it has never been this bad. And now claims and counter claims are being made over the matter between some lawmakers and the Commerce Minister. Simply ridiculous. As far as I am concerned, when the Minister says that "onion was selling at tk.20 per Kg.", I say he is telling lies.

How very childish and senseless it is to hear from a minister that he alone was not responsible for the deteriorating situation. The general idea of our lawmakers and the political hierarchy is that, 'let people continue to suffer while we continue to engage in all forms of blame games and meaningless duel of words in the comforts of cool-breezed air-conditioned conference rooms. These ministers routinely arrive in fancy Mitsubishi Pajeros and Nissan Patrols. Indeed history is being repeated here like 'Nero fiddling while Rome burns'.

The condition of the so-called middle class people of this country, to say the least, is now too critical due to this spiralling of prices of consumer goods. It is my earnest belief that the people should form "resistance committees" *Mohollah*-wise and go round the market places. If needed, "force" the dishonest traders to sell commodities at reasonable prices. This may fail or succeed but it is worth a try since the government has decided to hold yet "another strategic meeting on the 5th of November". After all, this is a crisis situation and matters need to be dealt with firmly and urgently.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

Ramadan and rising prices

In this holy month of Ramadan, people have once again become the victims of unscrupulous greed of some vested quarters. As I gather from newspaper reports, prices of essentials shot up, some exponentially, in recent days. It is an irony that the holy month, which is supposed to teach us restraints, instead gives opportunity to some people to satisfy their inexhaustible lust for money.

It is true that demand for some items like fruits, vegetables, etc. increased during Ramadan. But there is no shortage of supply to justify the skyrocketing prices. It is the irrational greed of unscrupulous business people which is to be blamed for the unjustified increase in the prices of essentials.

The Commerce Minister has been rebuked by the PM for his inaction in maintaining price stability. Surely, the price hike would not have been so grave had the government taken timely actions. It is rather a pity that the ordinary people are made hostage to the greed of the dishonest traders during occasions like the Ramadan.

During festivals and during crises (during Iraq war prices of essentials shot up without any justifiable reason), price hikes become a normal phenomenon in Bangladesh. We can only hope that the traders come to their senses and refrain from the unethical practices of artificially raising prices to enable people to observe the holy month of Ramadan with due solemnity and fervour.

KM Zubair Sadeque
Duquesne University, USA

Stop killing tigers, for God's sake

One more Royal Bengal tiger, the national animal of Bangladesh, was killed recently in Bagerhat district (DS: 20-10-03). How long will such acts continue? Aren't there any measures that can be taken by the government agencies responsible to stop this?

Several suggestions have been proposed in the different plans adopted to save the bio-diversity of the Sunderbans, prepared under various wildlife management projects. It is quite shameful for us that we do not care to take any practical steps to counter such acts of brutalities. The news commentary was also written in such a way that the tiger is to be blamed whereas the underlying causes lead one to believe the opposite.

We, humans, are driving away most of the animals from their native habitats; depriving them of their homes and food sources. If we, the greatest of all creations, can commit robbery and murder our fellow humans to satisfying our hunger and greed, then these poor animals are nothing to us.

We disturb them, encroach the forest habitats, poach on the animals they feed on, and then murder these animals when they make their way into human habitations.

The Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF), recently attended the Global Tiger Forum's meeting in New Delhi, a world body to find ways and take measures to protect tigers in their range countries. May I ask him, does this sound good when you read the news of a tiger killed, or an elephant shot with more than 50 bullets in a sanctuary?

The forest department, under MOEF, has to come up with some pragmatic steps so that such acts are not repeated and tigers are saved from being killed in the future. If the tigers are gone from the Sunderbans, no one

will be able to save the Sunderbans' mangroves from extinction. These tigers are the guardians of the forests.

SMA Rashid
Baitul Aman Housing Society,
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Protesting Mahathir's comments

I protest against Mr. Mahathir's comments regarding Jews in the OIC and APEC conference. I can comprehend why he and rest of the Muslim Ummah condemn Israel's Palestine policy. But I have absolutely no clue why the Islamic leaders try to make a conflict with a specific religion. We cannot hate the innocent Jews. Jews are built up with same qualities which we, the Muslims, are made of. Both have the

Wrong priorities beset the nation

Looking at the world around us, sometimes we are shocked to see the gaps in between people. We live on the same planet and we are pretty much aware of what is happening on the other side. Yet we, the Muslims, have managed to slip so behind. How and why?

Today we see scientists and engineers in the West working on quantum computers, particle accelerator, frozen light, black holes, nano technology, space station, theory of everything like the string theory, wormholes and even quantum teleportation (teleportation of photon has already been achieved!).

These things may appear out-of-this world to many people in our country; even to those with university education. Looking at the picture of the Super Kamiokande detector, for example, would scare the hell out of many people. This huge tank is filled with 50,000 tons of ultra-pure water and 13,000 photomultipliers are submerged inside the tank that looks like something either from Hollywood or from few thousand years in the future! But there are human beings like us on this planet, who are making these things while we can barely make a humble tyre. Amazing and amusing, isn't it?

rights to live peacefully. And everyone must recognise it. Protest against Israeli government's policy. Do not bring anarchy between religions.

Abu Md Fazle Arif
Dhaka

Fear of a Jewish planet

The OIC speech is not Mahathir's first brush with anti-Semitism. In "The Malay Dilemma," published in 1970, he wrote: "The Jews for example are not merely hook-nosed, but understand money instinctively." In 1997, when speculators drove down the value of the Malaysian currency, an angry Mahathir said, "We are Muslims and the Jews are not happy to see Muslims' progress. We may suspect that they have an agenda but we do not want to accuse them."

Certainly anti-Semitism is not limited to Muslim nations. In fact, through modern history, most of the violence and pogroms against the Jewish community were carried out by European nations. Infamously, the Vatican and the US Senate turned a blind eye to the Holocaust during World War II. One of the few times when Jews were treated more humanely was during the period of Muslim expansion. But in spite of this history, in today's geopolitical cauldron, Muslim anti-Semitism will always grab the biggest headlines and do more damage to Muslims themselves.

Of course, criticising the Israeli government is not the same as anti-Semitism. When Mahathir condemns Israeli aggression against Palestinians and neighbouring countries, he repeats a critique that many progressive Jewish commentators will agree with (recall, some of the strongest critique of Ariel Sharon's "Apartheid Wall" comes from the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz). But by expanding that critique to include the entire Jewish community, and to talk about "the Jewish race" and their "tendencies," Mahathir crossed over into anti-Semitism.

His comments come at a critical time for the Muslim ummah. Liberal Muslims are trying to push their countries to embrace human rights in places like Iran and Nigeria. Others are trying to stem the tide of converts to fanatical organisations preaching violence and the murder of civilians. In a time like this, Mahathir's comments may strengthen the hand of the right-wing elements within political Islam.

Naeem Mohaieem
Brooklyn, New York

Mahathir's words of wisdom

Wise people are wise because they know things that are not known to others. This knowledge does not just come to them. They search for it and learn. They keep an open mind and let things come in. That is how wise men become wise. Sometimes their words of wisdom become hard to understand by other people, because not everyone has an open mind.

When the wise words of Dr. Mahathir are trying to open our minds, what should we do? Close our eyes and ears to be led by the unwise who made us suffer for so long? I am worried not because there are fewer wise people today in the world; but that there are now fewer people who can understand the rare words of wisdom uttered by the wise ones. May Allah help us open our mind.

Ahmed Sharif
MBA Student, East West University

Build overhead railway

We are glad that the government is taking initiatives to build a bypass railway from ZIA to Kamalapur railway station. This was a long-awaited measure that should have been taken up by the previous governments. The bypass railway will ease traffic jam in the railway crossings inside the city.

In this regard, I think it would be appropriate if the government build an overhead track from ZIA to Kamalapur railway station. Although it would be costly, an overhead track will reduce distance and the time required for travelling between these two points.

A conventional surface track with roundabout and traffic jam will do little to ease our pains. Despite the cost involved, overhead railway track is the usual choice inside modern cities. Follow Tokyo's urban planning, if you like. It is also justifiable for the countless benefits it will bring to our congested city. I urge authorities concerned to consider building overhead railway track inside Dhaka city.

Abdullah Al Mamun
Intern, ADB Institute
Tokyo, Japan

Campus violence shows disrespect to nation

A university is the highest seat of learning. It's a place where people go to enhance and complete their education; where people go in as semi-educated and come out fully educated. And, when someone talks about a university, it gives one a picture of bright young students having fun and studying hard, thus setting their lives for a successful job.

But as far as the Dhaka University is concerned, it's the opposite. It's the ultimate spot of terrorism. It's a place where people go to enhance their moral power.

I might be generalising too much, and that all students might not be like this. It can also be that 5 or 6 per cent of the students create the nuisance.

But the harsh fact remains that never have I heard students "burning up cars", "throwing stones at officials building", "engaging in cross-firing", "harassing professors unnecessarily", "students having much greater power than any other officials", and most importantly "students being totally linked to politics".

No matter how small of a percentage create the problem, we have to realise that it is the scope of the problem that matters. Again, the behaviour of the DU students hardly match with any universities in the world. They act viciously, like barbarians and have no

Mahathir is irreplaceable

Many of the Malaysians will remain speechless for a while before replying if asked as to what is his or her feeling about the retirement of Dr. Mahathir. After 22 years of glorious tenure as the prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir said good bye. Within this span of time, he pulled Malaysia out of the miseries of a limping economy almost single handedly and turned it into one of the most prosperous countries in Asia.

As he retired, its not only Malaysia which has lost a leader. It's the entire Muslim world which is going to feel his absence. After his speech in the last OIC summit, it is more clear that among the 57 OIC states, among their few hundred leaders of all levels, its only Mahathir who possessed the courage and honesty to speak the bitter truth in the face of the super power.

1.3 billion Muslims of this world are looking towards the OIC for the protection of their religion and homelands, something the OIC could never deliver. Today, our dreams and hopes are shattered and battered. We feel tormented and humiliated. We have no identity of ourselves except being labelled as terrorists. USA can invade any country anytime with lame excuses; Israel needs no legitimate reason to kill people in Gaza or attack Syria; UN can go on imposing sanctions with uncorroborated allegations.

This situation must improve. With the present state of the UN, the role of OIC is more important for the Muslim world. This is the time that the OIC should start acting, if not reacting. First and foremost, the OIC should have a competent leader. A leader like Dr. Mahathir.

OIC should promote its Secretary General's post to Chairman and elect Mahthir as the Chair. A leader like him is a blessing for any community. If Mahathir leaves us now, we might have to wait for another hundred years to get some one like him. Point is, will the Muslims survive 100 years to see another Mahathir amongst them?

Md. Bashar Farhad
Mirpur, Dhaka

PHOTO: AFP

thugs. Who is to blame? Simple answer. The government. Is the problem unsolvable? On the contrary, I think the problem is relatively easy to solve. Ban student politics. Any student caught with any sort or arms go to jail. [Black rule, no mercy] Any sort of procession or any sort of protest WILL NOT be tolerated. It will be followed by a baton charge or *gono petani*. JCD or AL, have no place in the university. [go to Paltan Maidan and do whatever]. Students not attending classes up to a certain degree will be automatically removed from the university. The same rule shall be applicable for students not maintaining a satisfac-

better place to live in. On a scale of one to 100, recent remarks, by the ruling party leadership on media being jealous of their successes, deserve a very generous 1.5 (one and a half). The half mark is of course a grace. The prompt and befitting reaction to this effect from the editor of The Daily Star, Mr. Mahfuz Anam, deserves a special pat at the back.

Najmul Halim
Dhaka

My take on war on terror

how a man treat all the Iraqis engaged in the guerrilla war as terrorists! I am sure that he is unfortunate to watch the happy dancing of Iraqi civilian crowd after every event of American military casualties in recent days.

I think the Zionist media is not liberal enough to screen those events. He tried to justify the war on Iraq by the name of War on Terror. But his discontinued writing penned nothing in this regard. Even the desperate efforts made by the White House and Downing Street with 'sexed-up' documents could not convince the international community, let alone me.

What is the evidence of linkage between al Qaeda and Saddam? 3. Where are the Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq? 4. How could you justify thousands of deaths by US bombings? 5. What is the resolution of UN regarding wars? After enduring sanctions for more than a decade, militarily weaken Iraq should have been protected by the UN. Is it not the reason behind attacks on UN positions in Iraq? 6. If the war is for oil, is it right or lawful?

He also wrote some lines on Israel/Palestinian conflict and proved



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

PM's intervention needed to save wildlife

Almost every day as we open the pages of The Daily Star, we come across some sad news or photograph about the plight of our wildlife. Today (29 October), there was a photograph of a caged Purple Moorhen which is for sale in the market. What a beautiful bird! I don't know who will eat its meat?

It appears to me that we are totally oblivious to the destruction of our nature and wildlife. We should realise that it is essential for the government and the people to protect our wildlife at any cost. Only a few days back, I read about the killing of a wild elephant by a BDR officer.

There was another story about the killing of a tiger by villagers. What does our ministry of environment and forest do? Are the Secretaries and the Ministers capable of performing their responsibilities? Where do they spend the government money which is sanctioned for this particular sector?

We must appreciate that our NGOs and individual experts are active in this field, though much more needs to be done. There was a positive statement made by Prakriti Foundation on killing of the wild elephant by a BDR official and another letter written by wildlife expert, Dr. Zakir Hossain. Both got published in your daily. Your editorial on the subject was very timely too. But is there anyone listening to these sensible voices in the country? Can't our PM intervene in this matter? What wildlife treasure are we going to leave for our children and grandchildren?

Just recently, I visited the Modhupur forest and found it in a deplorable state. There is no canopy for our famous Capped Lengur. The *sal* trees are vanishing forever and with it will disappear our beautiful birds and mammals, like Capped Lengur. History will judge us very cruelly if we destroy our *sal* forest and substitute it by all sorts of cultivation like pineapple, banana, acacia and so on. I am sure there are hundreds of thousands others like me who love wildlife. One day, they will start doing something for the betterment of this pitiable situation.

Kantik Syed
Dhaka

respect for law. They have no respect for education, for professors and seniors. One might even surmise that they have no respect for the country either.

I myself am a student, and would have loved to study at the DU. But how can I walk around in a campus where there is cross firing going on, where there is always police battalion waiting, where you have politically related

tory grade point average. **Shady**
University of Toronto

Bravo! our Editors

Both in the vernacular and in the English, most of our editors are doing commendable jobs in trying to devise a road map embedded with goodwill, tolerance, virtues of true leadership -- exposing good, bad and the ugly. All this is done to make Bangladesh a

I have some comments on the letter titled 'My take on war on terror'. It was not clear what is the identity of S. Khan from the USA who expressed his take on the so-called "war on terror" in The Daily Star.

From his views on the most recent event, one can easily understand what is the power of the Western media's propaganda. It can make one blind to his own reasoning. It is ridiculous, judges the war from an American lens? May be he thinks that these kinds of thinking make him a perfect American. This is also wrong indeed.

I ask him to storm his brain slightly with following questions: 1. How could you make a change in the leadership of other independent nations under the international law? 2. Is it America's own War on Terror?

his inadequate knowledge on the long lasting issue. Finally, he puts his opinion that grabbing of oil in Iraq contributes to global peace, by stabilising oil price.

For his kind information, global peace does not depend on oil prices. Global peace depends mainly on fulfilling all basic needs of the world population. The American way of grabbing wealth and power and leaving half of the world's population under the poverty level cannot bring the much anticipated global peace.

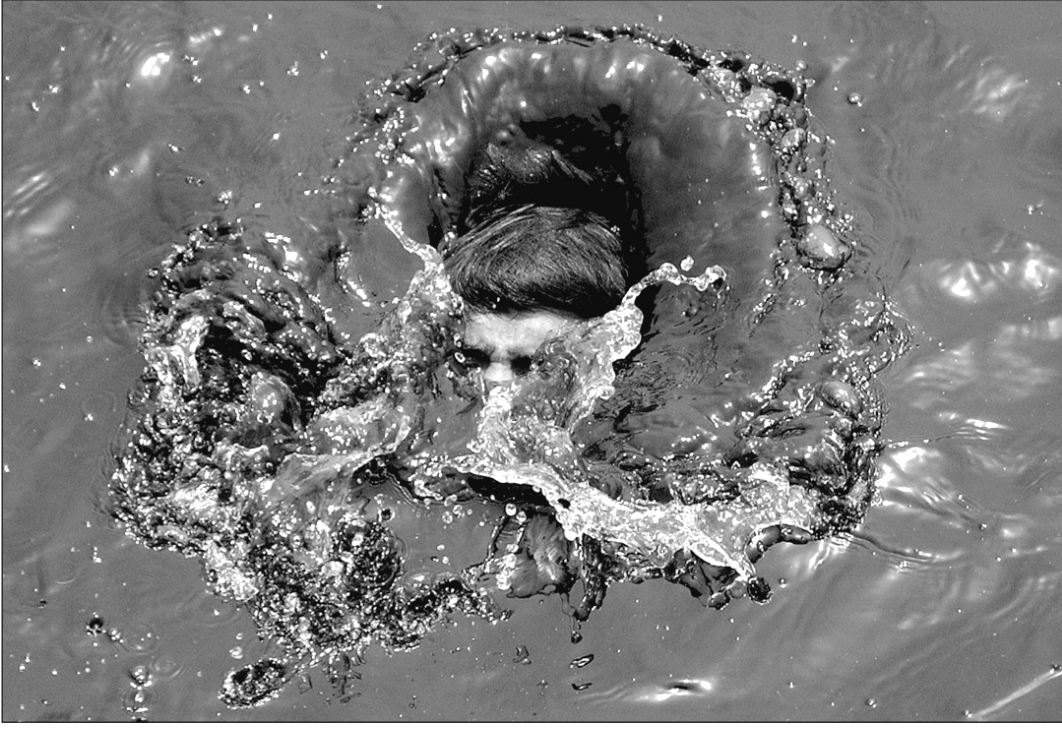
M Zahedur Rahman Chowdhury
IMS-CU, Chittagong

"On Mahathir and Hitler"

This letter refers to the letter titled "On Mahathir and Hitler" (Mahmood Elahi, Canada) that was published in this section of your newspaper on 29/10/03.

I think Mr. Elahi is spot-on his views about the Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohammed. Mahathir's statements in the OIC Summit, held in Malaysia, attacking the Jews was an absolute shocker. His statements attacked a particular community and it can be termed as "racist." Comments like these would only encourage those religious extremists whose only work is to attack innocent Jews living in Israel and around the world.

Aranya Syed
Dhaka, Bangladesh



Deep into development flood!

PHOTO: AFP

Really? Other countries spend billions in research and development, but our leaders spend millions of our precious money organising rallies, hartals and agitation with their thugs and hoodlums. Why is it that we never get sick and tired of the same pointless and disgraceful activities? When are we going to learn and put a stop to these crimes against humanity?

Azad Miah, Oldham, UK