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## Will we catch up with the world?

Only days ago the people of Georgia kicked out their president because of corruption and his failure to deliver. Not long ago, the people of Liberia--with a little help from the UN and the US--kissed goodbye to Charles Taylor. The British Conservative Party changed their leader William Hague, because they thought he couldn't deliver what they needed. They elected Duncan Smith, but he was also dumped, again because the party members weren't happy with his performance.

The governor of California was kicked out in the middle of his term because he couldn't deliver. Some thugs in Venezuela backed by the US--thought they had finally made it big-time, only to be kicked out within hours by both the people and the army.

Now let us look at a non-political case. When you get a job, your employer expects you to carry out the duties you agreed in return for a decent wage. If you don't do your job or don't attend regularly on time, your employer should talk to you, try to understand if you are having any difficulty. Depending on your situation, you do get further chance to perform your agreed duties. But if you fail again, you will lose your job and your employer will get someone else who can do the job better.

From all these different cases, it is very clear that what anyone promises before getting a job is irrelevant. What matters is what they deliver once on the job. If they cannot deliver what they promised (nobody is asking them to deliver something impossible, only what they agreed to), they quickly get replaced by someone else.

My simple question is: why are we paying for the two women leaders who have not delivered much, despite getting many chances?

Thirty-two years ago when we needed change, we all united together and brought it. Let's unite once again and bring about some change. You may not see any rewards in your lifetime, but at least your children will have something better to start with.

**Azad Miah**  
Oldham, UK

## HIV and behavioural trend

I understand almost all the HIV prevention teams are concerned like me and are directing their attention to 'hotel-based prostitution'! (Source: The Daily Star, 01-12-03). But, as a general citizen, I am amazed to notice the trend. Among several South East Asian countries, our country's HIV prevalence is significantly low. But our country is the "only" one having such a trend of hotel-based HIV proliferation!

It is possible to control the situation. Strict restrictive orders followed by monitoring and punitive measures against HIV spreading hotels might work!

I request the preventive teams to give emphasis on this kind of action. Please help our poor, who are almost ignorant. Media could play a certain role in this respect like the Indian media is doing, though I am scared to notice the situation in Mumbai. Nepal deserves appreciation.

Another point that we must not miss is that almost all income-



PHOTO: AFP

generating institutions are located in the capital; pushing most of the men to come to Dhaka, leaving their family in other towns or villages.

**Dr. Lailun Nahar, Dhaka**

## Lathi-Banshi Samity

A few days back, I wrote about the one-month embargo on the *Lathi-Banshi* (stick-whistle) *Samity* that had been successfully combating extortion and terrorism in Natore. I express my grievance as the banning of the *Samity* really hurt me.

It is painful to learn that the *Samity* is now sharply divided. Some people are actively trying to defame it as they are not in a position to do their brisk business of extortion. By dividing the business people, who are members of the *Samity*, they will resume extortion which is the main source of income for some political leaders and policemen.

As I was born in Natore, I have some idea about the leaders who are doing politics with this *Samity*. There might have been some wrongs committed by the *Samity* people. But this should not be an

excuse for banning the *Samity* and finally replace the leaders with government officials.

The sharp division within the *Samity* people shows how a good initiative in our society leads to an abject failure. I urge all the business people, political leaders and all others concerned to come forward to rebuild the image of the *Samity*.

**Mallik Akram Hossain**  
University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

## Congratulations, Mr. Alam

I would like to congratulate Mohit Ul Alam, writer of "Awake our conscience! Now or never!" (Star Chittagong, December 3) for having the courage to write this powerful piece. I agree with him wholeheartedly. Although I have been away from Bangladesh for a while now, I visit my country every year and keep abreast of Bangladeshi news.

I am worried for my family in Bangladesh since I am a Hindu. One of my cousins was brutally murdered at Sylhet Medical Col-

lege where he would have finished his course within just one more year. I have noticed that communal harmony in Bangladesh deteriorated over the past couple of years, especially since the BNP's coming to power. How can the government not acknowledge such facts if it truly values itself as a democratic institution?

What is even more surprising to me is that the government has a certain leniency towards crime, both politically and non-politically motivated. In order to become a substantive nation, our law enforcement system should be completely unbiased. How can we help our country become a better place to live in? I solicit answers from everyone!

**Sharmistha Dev**  
One-e-mail

## Dr. Kamal vs Dr. B

Everyone talks about people's support, whereas no one in reality bothers to adhere to or honour their opinion. Every political party tries to propagate or, in fact, to impose upon the public their ideology or whims in the name of the people. They really don't care whether one likes that or not. Take the example of 'hartaals' -- everyone knows that no one approves of any hartal anymore, but the political parties do call hartal any time they like in the name of the people and invariably declare the next day that the hartal was supported by all and sundry and was successful, irrespective of popular support!

People's support (to any cause or any party) can only be tested by election or referendum.

Now Dr. B has started campaigning for a 'third force', whereas Dr. Kamal is saying that "without people's support it would weaken the country's foundation". Of course we believe in the people, but no more in the marked politicians -- with whom people are not there. And I 'being one of the 'people' (totally non-political) do extend my support to the possible 'third force' -- which I am convinced is the cry of the day.

And if the people have lost faith (as claimed by the opposition parties and the discussants at a conference in the city on 2nd December) in their elected government, let's go for a referendum to find out what people really want. It's okay that the discussants dwell on law and order but blaming "repression on the religious minority" (as articulated by Taslima Nasreen in her book) appears to me as dictated by some external agency or their agents inside the country.

I am also with them to stress the unity of civil society members but do not agree that "religious militancy" exists in Bangladesh (as already acknowledged by the US and the West) and wonder how under the sun the JSD's Hasanul Haq Inu declared in the conference that "we are creating a situation for foreign aggression in the country".

It will perhaps be reasonable to ask him to further clarify this unwarranted claim.

I want to reiterate that we have tried the old politicians of several parties and no more want to fossilise our politics; rather we would like to look for the 'third force' (for our salvation).

**AF Rahman**  
Dhaka

## What's wrong with Longorkhana?

There is (or was!) a famine like situation (called Monga in Bangla) going on in the northern Bangladesh including most of the districts of greater Rangpur. News published in some dailies informed us that at least one baby died without food. Therefore, the government cannot claim that none died unfed!

Perhaps, some opposition parties were about to open a number of *Longorkhana* to feed the hungry people in that region. But the government cautioned, "don't try to open any *Longorkhana*." I got the impression that serving the hungry people by parties other than the government is not good for the incumbent leadership.

Then the question arises why the government failed to feed its people? What is more important -- saving the government's face or the lives of the citizens? If the government feels *Longorkhana* was not at all required, the people would not go there to take food even if the opposition or some philanthropists opened those for gaining cheap popularity!

I find nothing wrong in opening some *Longorkhana*. Then why was this cautionary signal issued that amounted to stopping feeding the hungry people? Isn't it like killing a child showing the logic that it is their (parents') production? What does the law say? Does it permit killing one's own sons or daughters?

**MAS Molla**  
BAAS, Dhaka

## Dr. B's plan

Recently, Dr. B's comments on national issues have drawn response from across the country. To these, I would like to add some.

Dr. B's discovery of a national crisis, who knows not, is true. But in case of Dr. B, such a discovery was not unconditional. It had to do with his own position and plight in politics. In his good days in the BNP, the country perhaps underwent crises that were far more precarious in degree and nature including a mock national election and a constitutional crisis. Dr. B



## "Why Taslima is so controversial?"

This refers to the letter of Ms Sharin Shajahan Naomi, Department of Law, DU, published on December 4. I agree with Ms Naomi that the so-called intellectuals should equally be condemned and ignored for publishing their explicit sexual experiences in the name of "modernism" and "progressivism" and truly their masks should be unveiled before the millions who look upon the intellectuals as their idols.

I do not believe that a person's sexual experiences with an array of intellectuals, where both the parties were engaged in the act, should be made public.

My point is Ms Taslima was an adult and she knew what she was doing at that period of time and now coming to public with that stuff is shocking and self contradictory.

I wonder how could some one like her claim to fight for or represent the women of the country.

I hope that answers your question.

**Md Mashiul Azam Khan**  
School of Banking and Finance,  
University of New South Wales, Sydney

then could not see the ghost as he had the guarantee of governmental perks and party blessings.

Second, the BNP cannot be wholly blamed for his elimination from the highest position. His growing up as a political leader and later assuming the designation of president were possible only for his long allegiance to BNP. Being nominated from a party because of being its member, he pretended not to recognise it any more. Availing many things in life, Dr. B probably ventured to earn a 'Shahbuddin-image' which was not at all compatible with his background. Again, passing on his vacant constituency to his son also did not speak well for his newly assumed 'great manly' approach.

Lastly, the most significant as well as alarming development is his pulling in civil society. True, civil society in Bangladesh has not yet flourished much. But if it has not yet earned people's respect, it has not at least earned their abhorrence. Mention may be made of its positive role in its efforts to influence government's policy on various crucial aspects and its role concerning environmental factors. And it is a very rare phenomenon in our country that their endeavour continued, irrespective of the party in power.

A separate political platform consisting of people from civil society, as Dr. B cherishes, and though very unlikely, may shatter the last hope of the country, turning it towards a greater vacuum. And whoever it may be, at least Dr. B's track record does not say that he can talk of such a platform. If we are frustrated by the two major political parties of our country, the idea that a dissident from one of those can rescue us is bound to be a mere illusion.

**Md Zahid Akter**  
Sylhet

## Terrestrial channel equipment

Not long ago, a lot of stories appeared in the press regarding use/misuse of BTV facilities and equipment by the now defunct Ekushey TV. One thing was clear to the public from those stories that the BTV had the necessary equipment and facilities to open a second terrestrial channel. Reportedly, problem arose because, among other things, these equipment and facilities were leased out to Ekushey TV for a nominal charge.

Now the obvious question that arises in one's mind is, what is the preservation mechanism for those facilities and equipment? Are those being kept as standby to the only BTV channel? Or could it be that the BTV procured these equipment because it was considering opening of a second terrestrial channel?

If none of the above is correct, then the BTV may seriously consider leasing out those equipment and facilities to the highest bidder. At least, such an action would fetch some revenue to the BTV. After all, these equipment and facilities were procured and developed with public money and as such they cannot be allowed to waste away.

**Syed Farhat Ahmad Roomy**  
New DOHS, Dhaka

## Changing the colour of police uniform

We all know the old saying that goes like this - black coal will remain black no matter how many times you wash it. When I read about the news of changing the colour of the uniform of our police force, I could not help wondering whether changing the colour of the uniform would bring any real change to the efficiency of our police.

It appears that the high-ups in the police department took the decision considering two factors, both of which appear to me somewhat irrational. First, they put forward the rationale that many of the private security forces have uniforms similar to the ones used by the police. If that is truly the case, I believe the police have sufficient authority to prevent the private security firms from using uniforms having close resemblance to that of the police.

In any case, there is no guarantee that the security firms won't start copying the new colour once it is introduced. The second rationale put forward by the police authorities is the fact that the common people associate the blue and khaki uniform of our police force to corruption, inefficiency, and to all the bad things. This is true. Over the years, the situation

has come to the point where people no longer have any confidence in the police.

Barring some exceptions (I think the Rapid Action Team has been a glaring example), people's perception of the police force is not far from reality. The question is, whether changing the uniform would help in changing the negative perception of the people. I am afraid not.

It would have been far more effective had the police bosses considered making some real changes like offering attractive incentive packages, recruiting bright and competent people with

high ethical standards etc. These would have made the desirable changes in helping the police force becoming effective in curbing crime and gaining confidence of the common people. Changing the colour of the uniform is not going to help in anyway.

**K M Zubair Sadeque**  
Duquesne University, USA

## On a third party...

Certainly, we need a change to get out of the two-party cycle of misrule.

Dr. B is an educated person, no doubt. But I am not sure how much

change can be expected from him. The reason behind my doubt is, like other political parties, BNP politicians have been involved in hazy practices all along. Lack of complete dedication to the development of people's life was persistent from day one of the inception of the party. And Dr. B survived all those years! That shows that his disagreement with the rest of the party is a minor one.

I am not trying to undermine any good initiative, but Dr. B must remember that his effort and agenda have to address chronic problems of our nation. His policies must stand out from the rest of the political parties. Only this can make him successful in bringing about a major change. The opposition political parties are now on the streets and will welcome any anti-government initiative. If Dr. B goes with those creeps, he will have no chance to make the desired changes.

The civil society must acknowledge that no matter how much glittering we see in the city's neon lights, or roads being made rickshaw-free, overall quality of life has gone down to an unbearable point, and its continuing. We need a big change, and educated honest people must come forward to save the nation from the evil parasites.

My hearty support to Dr. B's initiative as long as it is for our collective good...

**Nazmul Ahsan**  
Wilmington, DE, USA

## Dr. Benkin's appeal

I was intrigued to read Mr. Shibly Azad's letter on Dr. Benkin's article praising Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim country and urging us to play a role in solving the Israel-Palestine conflict. I guess that Mr. Azad is faintly aware of our geopolitical realities and definitely unaware of the basis of the Israel-Palestine conflict to suggest a role for Bangladesh in resolving it.

Dr. Benkin is indeed a clever man, no doubt aware where and how to appeal in order to get a favourable response. Look how easily he has found a convert in Mr. Azad!! What he has successfully hidden from people like Mr. Azad are the causes of the conflict.

Let me briefly refresh these for him and Dr. Benkin. Israel was created on Arab land by force that resulted in forcible eviction of millions of Palestinians who have been spending the last 50 years or more in pitiable conditions in refugee camps in the West Bank and in other Arab countries. It has extended its 1948 borders by occupying more lands through wars of 1967 and 1973 with its neighbours. It violates UN resolutions like they were dirt fit for garbage and possesses an arsenal of WMDs that made Saddam Hussein (when he was in power) or Kim Jong look saintly. It is building a wall across the national borders in Palestinian land in total violation of international law. It has a professional army that kills innocent people including women and children (calls it collateral damage!!) under the direct orders of its prime minister which led to 27 of its airforce officers to come out publicly against such state-sponsored terrorism in the West Bank. Its prime minister has a case against him as a war criminal in a court in Belgium.

With the policies being pursued by the Sharon

government, there is no scope for mediation for Bangladesh or any other country. One does not and cannot mediate between an occupying force and an occupied one except telling the former to end the occupation. The onus to end the conflict rests almost entirely with the Israelis. They have to unilaterally do the following. First, withdraw from Palestinian land and give Palestine the right to be a state with Jerusalem as its capital. Second, abide by all UN resolutions on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Third, allow the Palestinian refugees to return back to their lands. Fourth, stop building the wall on Palestinian land. Fifth, stop construction of settlements and bring down settlements built illegally forthwith. Finally, it has to abandon the idea of finding a military solution to the conflict that Mr. Sharon seems hell bent upon, but one that his own people are now rejecting. Apart from the 27 airforce pilots, 4 former security agency chiefs and the current chief of its armed forces have criticised the policy of aggression of the present Israeli government.

Once Israel takes these corrective steps, the rationale for the Palestinians to fight the Israelis including suicide bombings would cease to exist, automatically leading to peace.

The cancer in the Israel-Palestine conflict is the occupation that can be resolved only by a quick and unequivocal Israeli response. Bangladesh is doing fine, refraining from recognising Israel which is a principled stand and should have no problem recognising it once Israel shows respect for international law and world opinion by giving back the Palestinian people their rights.

**Shahjahan Ahmed**  
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

## Rein in the fanatics

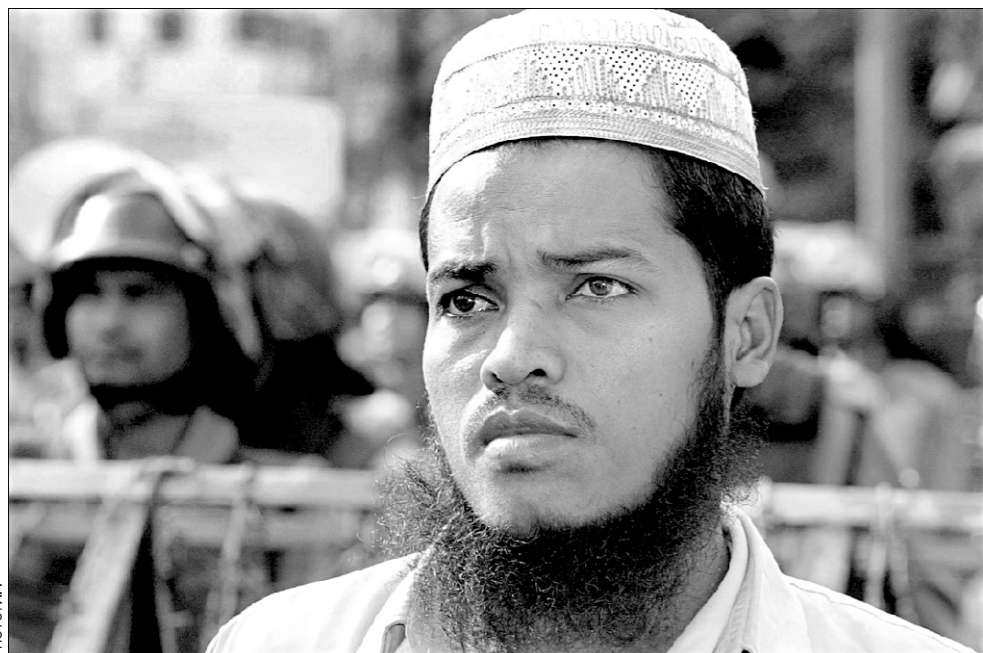


PHOTO: AFP

Thank you for your front page news item, "Anti-Ahmadia group gives one-week deadline to govt" [The Daily Star, December 6, 2003]. My attention has been drawn to the anti-Ahmadia group's ultimatum to the Bangladesh government to declare the Ahmadian community as "non-Muslims."

It is abhorrent to hold that the state should be in the business of deciding who is a "Muslim" or who is not, or for that matter who is a "Hindu" or who is a "non-Hindu," or who is a "Jew" or who is a "non-Jew," and so forth. The state should not have any position on the religious identity of its citizens. Every person and every group, irrespective of their religious conviction, should be free to practise his or her religion and religious beliefs. Bangladesh is a state of its citizens.

I find it appalling that Mohammed Mamtaji and his associates are calling for 'jihad' against the Ahmadian community and have openly threatened Ahmadians with

arson. Mr. Mamtaji and his cohorts are disgrace to the Muslim community because their actions violate the cardinal Islamic values of tolerance, mutual acceptance, religious freedom, theological diversity and dissidence. They should be widely condemned for inciting violence. Those who preach hatred between Shias and Sunnis, between Muslims and Hindus, or between any religious and ethnic groups are the most harmful and vile people on earth.

To pander to such people is a crime against humanity. The Bangladesh authorities need to ensure that such activities to incite violence and take over the property of a religious community are immediately stopped. As a people, we have a collective responsibility to protect the rights of all communities in Bangladesh.

**Dr. Tanweer Akram**  
Columbia Pike, Arlington, USA