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# PM's visit to India



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's pre-election visit to India should give India an opportunity to ask her a few pertinent questions. She talks about developing good relations with neighbours, but castigates India in open election rallies. This is rather perplexing.

**Shanta Rahman**  
Australia

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Will the visit of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to India help protect the interests of Bangladesh? She is supposed to discuss the issues like Tata investment in Bangladesh, India-Myanmar gas pipeline, rising extremism, illegal migration, border issues, security related matters, trade and sharing of water of common rivers.

What will be discussed regarding these issues? Will she be able to play a vigorous role? India is not giving our share of water. As a result, the farmers in northern districts are not getting water. The land is turning into desert day by day.

BSF is killing our people on a regular basis. How many lives will be lost in the hands of BSF?

India is erecting Tipaimukh Dam; consequently Surma and Kushiara will dry up which will affect the agriculture of northeastern regions. Farmers of those areas will suffer from scarcity of water.

So the prime minister will have to raise quite a few tricky issues.

**Taslim Hasan Sabu**  
University of Dhaka

# Women in a man's world



Why is it when men can't use intelligence, might, finances and other means available to them to put down women they resort to religious references? In the Holy Quran it is clearly stated that God punished both Adam and Eve for their sins. Nowhere is it alluded that God punished them both for Eve's sins. They were both punished and later forgiven for their repentance.

Now religion aside, Mr. Quasem writes about Gender Equality and instead of talking about equality when it comes to natural rights he talks about equality in terms of physical attributes and differences. He easily forgets the fact that differences have allowed procreation and the continuance of our kind. His write-up as he mentions women giving birth and continuing mankind sounds facetious at best. He says that it is natural that women are weaker. I assure you if women were weak they would not have given birth. Imagine passing a kidney stone and multiply that many times over.

Mr. Quasem states from what he viewed that "In Bangladesh it seems, men will never learn to value women." The writer makes this general statement because it required him to travel thousands of miles away from the land he was born to learn that women have "value".

Instead of correcting his cook's view about women and their leadership and work abilities he simply observed in awe. Instead of admitting that the cook's narrow mindedness and lack of education are the reason for his sexist comments he simply excused him because of some facts that he himself believes in. The author feels the same way about women still and simply learned to hide these thoughts after his residence in the US. He forgets that the condition of our country under the rules of both Prime Ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina are still much better than the condition it was in during the time of President Ershad and his predecessors. Yes, crime has increased and so has corruption but blame it on the increase in population and consumerism, do not blame it on women. Let us not forget that majority of our MPs are men.

Mr. Quasem believes that "The Bangladesh government must take severe actions to change this mindset. With roughly 70 million women, the population is and will remain unequal." According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation the women make up 48.6% of the population that translates into: for every one woman there is 1.05 men. The discrepancy in population is not so great that women need special protection. What we need is our God given rights to make decisions, fair treatment so that we can apply for the same jobs and leadership posi-

tion as men. Women want to win on their merits and not because they are the weaker sex and they need laws to protect them.

Mr. Quasem readily pats himself on the back for participating in an organisation that stops violence against women. Participating in that organisation is not enough of a reason to make him understand the need for gender equality. So he doesn't think women should be beaten like animals. But, he still believes women are weak because they are physically different from men, he still believes that our government is corrupt and ineffectual because it is headed by women, he still believes that religion clearly faults women, he clearly believes that bigotry towards women is justified in Bangladesh because of our culture, he believes this because his opinions about women are still unaltered but he was forced to make changes to his attitude because he resided in a country where his next employer may well possibly be a woman.

**Zeenat Z. Syed, On e-mail**

Are we heading for a catastrophe? Day by day the occurrence of VAW is becoming alarming. But we have little time to think about the atrocities committed against vulnerable women.

We urgently need some reinvigoration of our administration, especially law enforcement agencies to mitigate these atrocities which are horrific and unbearable. To overcome this situation we need some institutional change. It may be some bottom line change or change in some ground rules. For example, we need proper training for the law enforcement agencies on certain specific issues. They have to know the societal limitations, which creates VAW. They have to know social stigmas, which are the breeding ground for VAW. They have to perform their actual duties without fear or favour. They have to create an atmosphere so that people trust them and will seek justice promptly. We have to stop Fatwa by any means. Fatwa based violence is increasing rapidly in our country. Women are the worst victims of fatwa.

To reduce VAW, we have to ensure female education. The dowry culture should also be eliminated to protect the vulnerable women.

A holistic campaign is necessary for uplifting women's status as human beings. We are emphatically saying that women should join the decision making process at the highest policy formulation level, otherwise things will not change quickly.

**Md. Azmal Hossain, On e-mail**

# Managing energy resources

1. We have to maximise the use of coal for generation of our electricity to meet all our future needs.  
2. Minimise use of expensive and scarce liquid fuel in all fields. All petrol and diesel engine run vehicles should be switched over to using Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) or Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) i.e. butane or propane gas at the earliest. We could also consider using LP gas extensively for cooking instead of using our valuable natural gas. This will save our forest resources besides minimising use of kerosene-- another expensive liquid fuel that we have to import. Agricultural pumps should also use alternative fuel e.g. CNG or LPG instead of diesel.

Railway engines could also use alternative fuel instead of diesel. This will minimise pilferage of diesel fuel, besides there will be great savings in costs of fuel. All inland passenger and cargo vessels can also be modified to run on alternative fuel or on dual fuel i.e. small percentage of diesel along with alternative fuel. All these should be able to reduce our import of liquid fuel considerably thereby bringing down our fuel bill to a great extent. Brazil has been mixing ethanol derived from sugarcane with diesel fuel and they are using the mixture as diesel substitute. Though of late they have developed engine that can operate on pure ethanol. The Brazilian authorities claim that it is worthwhile producing ethanol from sugarcane when the crude price exceeds 37\$/barrel. I feel that we could convert our existing sugar mills to sugar refinery (partially) and ethanol manufacturing plants. We could import raw sugar and refine these in these refineries to meet our domestic needs and export any surplus that we may have. Ethanol derived from sugarcane could be mixed with diesel to reduce our fuel bill. This I am sure will make both the sugar refinery and ethanol plant profitable and the farmers will get fair price for their produce. The sugar refinery will run for the whole year and the ethanol plant seasonally.

3. South Africa is trying to develop liquid fuel from coal. We could co-operate with them in this regard or at least keep an eye on the developments taking place there.

4. We have to conserve our limited natural gas resources. We must not use our gas for our future fertiliser plants. Instead, we should build our natural gas based fertiliser factories in the Gulf region where natural gas is available at a fraction of the cost of our own natural gas. We could produce fertiliser there for our own use besides exporting to other countries.

5. All our future electricity generation plants must be coal based. We should also keep our option for nuclear power plants open. For us nuclear energy is the best option available to us and we should actively pursue it.

6. We should modify our existing "Bangladesh Diesel Plant" to produce engine that runs on alternative fuel e.g. CNG or LPG. The engines produced in this plant could be used to replace existing engines in automobiles, power pump engines, engines for mechanised boats etc. The plant could also convert existing diesel engines in use to use alternative fuel at a considerably cheaper cost and this will go a long way in converting almost all our portable and automotive engines to using alternative fuel in place of expensive diesel fuel. The conversion will also reinvigorate this sick plant.

7. It is very strange that we have to look for donors to finance new power projects. The charges we pay for our electricity is not less than what is paid by subscribers in our neighbouring countries. Besides, for electricity generation the rate paid for natural gas is less than one third of the prevalent international market rate of such fuel. Under such circumstances, power generation and distribution companies should be floating on money and should easily be able to finance their new power plants out of their own earnings. If required they could take commercial loan and should also be able to repay that out of their own earnings. I would like to know why that is not happening. Is it because of massive corruption in the power sector? Or is it inefficiency and negligence? Or both? What is the reason? The reason must be investigated and found out and those responsible for the present sorry state of the power sector must be brought to book. If this is done, only then can we find out means of getting out of the present quagmire that we are in.

I would also request the honourable minister in charge of power not to act as CEO of PDB, DESA, DESCO, REB etc. The running of these organisations should be left to honest and efficient professionals of proven track record rather than very poorly paid engineers who have their eyes on making money only.

The government must also realise that poor pay only attracts substandard professionals and the result is what we are seeing. To run a commercial undertaking profitably and efficiently, it must have the best professionals available in the country to work for the organisation and they have to be paid a salary their peers in the private sector get and that attracts them. It is said, "If you throw peanuts, you only attract monkeys." So there is no alternative to competent professionals for running a massive technical undertaking such as the power sector.

**Salahuddin Ayubi**  
Indira Road, Dhaka

**Performance against Kenya**

First of all, I congratulate the Bangladesh cricket team for their very good performance against Kenya. It has surely been a great performance. Our cricketers were positive throughout the match.

Now the only problem that we have is that we easily get carried away whenever we win any match. This should not be our attitude. Winning a match or two after losing many is not a big deal.

**Minhaj Ahmed**  
Uttara, Dhaka

# Learners and mobile

Even schoolboys and girls use mobile on a regular basis. A question arises- what are they doing with it? Generally, they use it to communicate with others. But most of the time their accounts are empty. That's why they give missed calls in order to remember their friends and others. The use of missed call is vastly seen in classrooms.

Some days ago mobile companies began a competition of offering cheap and almost free service. At that time it was noticed that many youths were spending sleepless nights. In our hall I saw my friends gossiping for hours together. Most of them were dozing in class next morning. But they seemed to be happy!

But now the situation has changed. Free service is gone. Now at the time of talking we have to be conscious about our mobile balance. The government has thought about the future of the young learners. That's why they ordered mobile companies to withdraw free offers. But, strangely, they don't think about the high call rate.

**Sadat Shahriar**  
RUET

# What a match!

The record-breaking ODI match between South Africa and Australia made it clear once again that the game of cricket is indeed unpredictable in every sense of the term. What a cricket battle it was that day at Wanderers in South Africa! About nine hundred runs were scored on that very day when South Africa beat the Australians chasing a mighty total of 434 in a breath-taking finish! The batsmen hit twenty-seven sixes and eighty nine fours! South Africa made 438 in reply to register their name on the pages of history!

The nerve-wrecking match that rewrote the history of ODI cricket adds more to the point that miracle still happens in cricket. Is it an inexhaustible game?

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
Agrabad, Chittagong

# Disclosure of wealth

Political parties in Bangladesh are very often blamed for all sorts of ills prevailing in the society. Among others, accumulating wealth by illegal means has been pervasive among the leaders. Politics has been a lucrative business to make money within a short period of time. Deputy leader of the opposition Mr Abdul Hamid has reaffirmed this claim while he said in the parliament that if you invest one crore taka in the election then, when elected, you can earn 100 crore taka. Reportedly, many politicians have become

millionaires by virtue of being political leaders alone! Both the ruling four-party and the opposition 14-party alliances promised to disclose wealth of ministers and MPs. Their rhetoric has not been reflected in their actions, though.

According to a DS report, the deputy leader of the opposition Abdul Hamid proposed formation of either a parliamentary body or a judicial commission to probe the "wealth accumulated through corruption" by the family members of the incumbent prime minister as well as former premier Sheikh Hasina. But the speaker and the ruling party did not respond to the deputy leader's suggestion. We appreciate the deputy leader of the opposition's integrity. We urge the incumbent four-party alliance government to accept his proposal for fulfilling one of their pre-election commitments.

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

# BTV

BTV is the vision of Bangladesh but in real perspective it is the representative of powers that be and other governmental agencies. This sounds odd though, over the years a plain truth has emerged to me: the programmes of BTV depends on the ruling party's likes and dislikes. The BTV projects the two most prominent political personalities in our history according to the position of the two major political parties. The ruling party decides how a particular leader would be projected and what would be the fate of others.

So it is totally dominated by politics. As such, it can never become a truly popular television channel.

**Mehedi Hassan**  
Ibrahimpur, Mirpur, Dhaka

# SSC examinations and hartal

I fail to understand while the most important public examinations are taking place throughout the country how can we find logical and scientific reasons for so many agitations at the same time? Will our political leaders compensate the parents whose children will not succeed in the examinations?

I pray to God to give me patience to overcome so many difficulties in our miserable life.

**Thomas Gomes Bhura**  
Manipuripara, Tejgaon



# Cruelty to women

Cruelty to Shahin Sultana (DS: March 16) has crossed all limits of bestiality, brutality and sadism that one could imagine. All I can say is are the perpetrators of this beastly criminal act, human beings? Are we civilised beings? May be they are JMB plants in police, or JMB supporters. The authorities need to find this out for sure! Even wild animals and beasts are treated better than this. It is indeed a shame and a slur to the nation!

Unfortunately, the face of the country has been beaten black and blue. It would be in the fitness of things if our legal luminaries advise and assist Shahin Sultana to fight this bestiality through legal means. A compensation of take one crore (tax free) plus costs would be an exemplary lesson for the government; and they deserve it!

The enquiry report from the police is a morbid joke and an absurd piece of stupidity if not anything else. It is like asking the thieves to enquire if they have committed theft! One cannot imagine such ideas even in "Alice in Wonderland". It can possibly only be an absurd reality of "Malice in Bangladesh". What more organised criminality is in store for us?

**A frightened citizen, On e-mail**

Main opposition AL-led 14-party alliance called a strike protesting against the death of a Jubo League leader in crossfire. We watched on television police brutality on opposition pickets. The attack on women crossed all limits of civility.

**M A H Nazim, University of Dhaka**