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Colliding with the state!

Lisa Botos from Time Magazine in Hong Kong, had done most of the hard work. Permissions had been obtained and the protocol arrangements had been made. The shoot was on. Having gone through the security hoop at the prime minister's secretariat, I had settled in at the waiting room along with my colleagues-- photographer Aminuzzaman from Drik and writer Alex Perry and editor William Green from Time. That was when the trouble started. Officials rushed to usher me out of my seat. I was wondering what other security alert I had triggered off. I had taken a seat not allotted for me!

I had only been allocated a few minutes for the cover shoot, which went well despite one of my lamps blowing on me, but luckily the prime minister had agreed to our suggestion that we follow her on her trip to Pabna. I scurried to change gear for the outdoor shoot. Emptying memory cards, handing over existing images to Amin to take to the library, a quick visit to the loo, were all things that needed to get done, except that I was told "hurry, she is on her way to the helicopter." Dumping equipment into my camera bag, handing over my laptop to Amin, I stuck my digital wallet into the pile and made a dash for it. The loo would have to wait. That was when a strong arm jutted out in the corridor. The security guard had prevented me from running into the prime minister! Alex calmly asked me if I had run into other heads of state before. "Only once" I had said, as I had nearly bumped into Mahathir while running up the stairs at the Mandarin Oriental in Kuala Lumpur. But that was a long time ago.

It was a long and eventful day and one I must write about. Shahidul Alam On e-mail

Smuggling

Smuggling is nothing new in this country and is parallel to the official trade. That is why smugglings through road, sea and air have taken a real Herculean shape in Bangladesh, severely affecting our already fragile economy.

It is not that the people involved in land, sea or airport customs are not doing anything to prevent this alarming rise of smuggling. But some of them are indirectly involved in this smuggling process and, as such, remarkable success against the smugglers is yet to come. The equation is very simple, the people, who are supposed to curb smuggling, themselves get involved in the same dirty process out of greed, it's really hard to win the battle against smuggling. We must admit, despite all these limitations, that some of our customs officials and other law enforcers are doing a good job. They are nabbing the organised gangs of smugglers. But it is indeed a surprise for us that along with all other goods, diesel is also smuggled out of our country. Kallol Bhatola Road, Dhaka

ZIA: poorly managed

I am writing to bring to your attention the miserable maintenance standards of a public facility that has such international usage in our country. It is appalling that compared to other international airports around the world, Zia International Airport is so greatly below standards. Toilets are filthy, smelly, and ill maintained. Toilet flushes do not work, water taps do not close properly which results in thousands of gallons of water being wasted every day. Toilet commodes are broken and extremely unhygienic to use. Despite so many cleaners who are employed by the Civil Aviation of Bangladesh being on duty, these filthy airport toilets are never properly cleaned. There are no water fountains in the airport terminals for

drinking water. Is this the example we should set for people visiting Bangladesh from other countries?

Moreover, most Bangladeshi people have no civic sense whatsoever. They will spit their paan right into the washbasin and will not even have the courtesy to wash the basin after use, making it impossible for other people to use it. They also throw their cigarette butts into the sink. They will not flush the toilet after usage, making the toilet area extremely unbearable. And they do not have the courtesy to close the water taps properly before leaving the toilet. I have witnessed water taps running continuously with nobody using the water. As a result, so much of the already limited

country. Before the BNP came to power, Bangladesh was champion in corruption only once, but it has won the title four times during the BNP's rule.

What does the ruling part have to say about it? Babar Islam Eastern University, Dhaka

Language only?

Now it is important to have a skilled computer programmer in any organisation. Almost every CEO of an organisation is shouting that he needs a skilled programmer. Let me tell you some funny things. Once I went for interview for an IT job and they took a written exam. Do you know what were the questions? It's

an organisation can get a skilled programmer. Sabbir Hossain Tanvir On e-mail

Plane crash

The recent crash of a fighter plane of Bangladesh Air Force with its pilot flight cadet Taniul Islam dead on the spot drew our notice to the hazards associated with operating aircraft in our country. A survey report says that there have been 44 deaths of air force personnel so far and only in 50 per cent cases could the reasons be unearthed. That means that the other accidents are still clueless.

With this awesome fact there goes the syndrome of nose-diving of the flights of Bangladesh Biman which rings an alarm bell.

There had been much talk over the issue, many measures have been taken into account, yet none could stop this ghastly phenomenon. That reveals our incompetence, sheer negligence and above all our ailing mindset. We do not do the fact-finding.

We have to address this recurring national loss and take such measures as will lessen the vulnerability of aircraft of all denominations. Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong

Surprised passenger

A couple of days ago after passing my days pleasantly with my parents as well as my relatives, I was coming back to my working station. Like others travelling, I got ticket earlier and was waiting for the Chittagong-bound bus at 7.30pm. Having got into the bus, I took my seat and noticed an old man who sat beside me.

During travelling he started to have a cigarette. I requested him to refrain from smoking and said that smoking not only harms the smoker but also the surrounding environment. Besides, it is banned as per the existing law of the country. Having heard my speech he replied loudly, "Would you, being a boy like my son, teach me where to have a cigarette?" Hearing his strange speech, I decided not to talk about the matter any more.

I think that it is possible to make the vehicles smoking free by introducing a law and ensuring its strict enforcement. Md. Asikur Rahman CEPZ, Halishar, Chittagong

Rotten sweetmeat

Just the other day as I was coming from Dhanmondi, I stopped by a sweetmeat shop in Shaat Masjid Road and bought some sweetmeats and yoghurt from it. After coming back home, I found that one of the two sweetmeat items that I had bought strongly smelt of kerosene oil and I called them up instantly. They said I could come back and get it changed but as I live in Gulshan, it was not possible for me to go and change it. But I was shocked that in spite of all these actions taken against unhygienic foods, how come a shop in Dhanmondi could dare to sell sweetmeats like these?

I don't know the contact number of the mobile court; otherwise I would have taken the trouble of informing them about it.

The mobile courts should look into the matter. M. Rizwan Sharif On e-mail

Journalists in trouble

The incident in Chittagong Stadium was very shameful for the nation as a whole. It was also a threat against journalism and the status of our press media. In a democratic country like Bangladesh, how could the police behave so barbarically? The image of our country has been demolished with the attack of police on photojournalists. This is because there were lots of international journalists who got a bad impression about our law enforcement

agencies. Again, we cannot imagine how a policeman could raise his hand on a very senior and renowned photojournalist. We saw how a law enforcer beat him up. There is no doubt that this was a black day in our history.

We cannot exist as a democratic country when such incidents take place. Kazi Abubakar Siddique Lalmatia, Dhaka

Macabre policing

We were appalled at the barbaric police assault on the photojournalists in Chittagong. The police showed savage brutality to drive away the journalists from the stadium. The police force led by an officer swooped on the agitating photojournalists. The salvo was really egregious, bestial and nefarious. The untoward incident indicates that we are living in a police state. The scene of the police attack was horrible and shocking. We became shell-shocked when we saw that an officer took part in the attack. He punched a senior most photographer. The police failed to handle the situation adroitly, rather they showed their bellicose and barbaric instincts. We came to know that the DC has been closed already and the government is going to form a judicial probe body to investigate the matter neutrally. The offence of the police is culpable and they need to be given exemplary punishment to prevent repetition of such incidents in future. We hope that the probe body will delve into the case meticulously.

The culprits must not go unpunished. Molla Mohammad Shaheen Dept of English, DU

Cellular circus?

A leading service provider is putting up their ads for the "sensational" lower than one taka call-rate in such a way that the rate itself, in Bengali, is highlighted in the largest possible size of letters on the billboards, but the conditions under which this rate can be availed are in very small writings in English!

What is it? CNR Chittagong

Poorly crafted apology?

A few days ago the DMP commissioner apologised to a group of journalists for the shameful incidents at Chittagong Stadium prior to Bangladesh's second Test match against Australia. Such and other apologies from ministers and senior police officers is by all means very praiseworthy. However, I was shocked when I heard the police commissioner say that the police are always advised that they cannot "raise their hands" at three categories of people. First were the senior politicians, second were the journalists, and third were the women. So, I am happy for people of these categories, but at the same time I am worried because the police chief is suggesting that it is okay for the police to rough me up, because I am not a politician. I am also not a journalist, and I am not a woman.

Isn't it wrong when people respond to their frustration and raise their hands at rickshaw pullers, servants or even beggars? Isn't a person raising a hand at a rickshaw puller only doing so because he knows he is better than the rickshaw puller? Would the same person raise his hand at someone in a car? Lastly, those who thought what the police did in Chittagong was bad, must know that doing the same to others is as bad too.

Isn't what is wrong always wrong? Morality was not meant to be a product that you sell differently to different market segments. Morality is not meant to be a product that you differentiate using different packaging. It is an intangible asset that increases your equity, but the sad thing is until you have it you don't know and hence you don't strive for it, and that is the catch 22. I was expecting the police commissioner to know this; maybe he does, and just poorly crafted what he really wanted to say. Touhid R. Sacramento, California

Movement in NEPAL



The movement against King Gyanendra to restore democracy is expression of public opinion against monarchy. People from all walks of life politicians, journalists, professionals, government servants and workers even the judges of the Supreme Court-- are participating in the current movement.

To my mind, this is basically not a democratic movement. Similar movements were also seen in Georgia though it did not succeed. Election is the only democratic process through which the existing leadership can be changed.

Taslim Hasan Sabu MBA, University of Dhaka

Draft coal policy

Mustafizur Rahman's article (DS: March 29) and Nuruddin M. Kamal's article in the fortnightly "Power & Energy" (March 16) raise the serious issue of Bangladesh's energy future. Going through both the write ups, I feel we cannot and should not act in haste and repent at leisure. Most of our decision making has been unfortunately just that.

Nuruddin Kamal aptly sums it up, and I quote: "Under no circumstances the long term interests should be compromised. Exporting these commodities (gas and coal) will remind of the days when the country was being used for indigo production, raw jute, cotton, all exported to foreign lands and the exorbitant profit pocketed by the traders giving very little to the people of this part of the world which is now Bangladesh. Should we not learn something from history?"

I believe this very exploitation of our resources by others was the key motivation behind the creation of Bangladesh. The cultural exploitation of our mother tongue was what

broke the camel's back, and led to the events of 1971, and subsequently Bangladesh's emergence.

Going through Table I of Mustafizur Rahman's article, I believe the approximate cost / yield ratio for contractor or self exploitation could be much higher, because the extractable estimate of 20% should go up over the life of the mine and after over five to ten years of operation the overall yield may well be around 40% based on similar experience of Indian mines in West Bengal and Bihar. The figures given could be the basis for the first couple of years of mining.

I would urge that we should have open discussions and firm basic understanding of the modality of our policy. Some delay in framing this policy will not matter, as it will pay off in better homework and awareness on the subject. The decision we take will stay with us for at least the next 50 years if not more and should be taken with sincerity. Let us not forget "a stitch in time saves nine".

S.A. Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka



The number of hartals being called by the opposition is quite obnoxious, to say the least. It makes sense to have Friday holiday, Saturday hartal day and 5 other working days! I understand the democratic right to call a hartal to protest and demonstrate, but a line needs to be drawn.

For the benefit of all, I would suggest either call a hartal in Dhaka and arrange a rally with 100,000 to 200,000 people, that sends a message (like the anti-war protests in major cities around the world every year), or have a completely non-violent hartal that sends an even stronger message. That would really make the police and the establishment look bad (which seems to be a key motivation), similar to the Gandhian non-cooperation movements. The amount of damage caused to our businesses, school and university goes and shop owners is just not acceptable. I'm just surprised that these people never call a hartal protesting political hartals. Ashfaq Siddiqui, On e-mail



BSF firing

Bangladeshis are getting killed in the border areas every day. There is no solution in sight.

The government should raise the issue to its Indian counterpart in all seriousness and ensure an end to shooting of Bangladeshis.

Imrul Islam On e-mail